

AN ANALYSIS OF THE FICTION OF
CHARLES W. CHESNUTT

A Dissertation
Presented to
The College of Arts and Sciences
Drake University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Arts

by
Harold J. Bruxvoort
February 1988

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by
Harold J. Bruxvoort

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Dr. Max Autrey

Susan Wright
Dr. Susan Wright

Myron Marty
Dr. Myron Marty
Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

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Summary of Author: Charles W. Chesnutt (1858-1932) is a black short story author and novelist whose two volumes of short stories and three novels of purpose depict racial tensions present in the South during the post-Reconstruction era. He addressed a culture dominated by the myth of white superiority and black inferiority.

Chesnutt's purpose in his fiction is to present a perspective of racial tensions and social issues confronting Southern whites and blacks that differed from the perspective presented by writers of the plantation tradition fiction.

Rationale: Since black authors from 1853 to the 1890s basically reflected the themes of plantation tradition fiction and thus ignored social and political issues facing blacks in the 1890s, this analysis of Chesnutt's fiction is made to determine whether he did present a differing perspective of slavery and of white-black issues in the South.

Procedure: This study is based on the reading and analysis of primary sources--The Conjure Woman, The Wife of his Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line, The House Behind the Cedars, The Marrow of Tradition, and The Colonel's Dream--as well as his letters collected by Helen, his daughter. Material from the Charles Chesnutt Collection was also incorporated into this study. Secondary sources include articles by Chesnutt's contemporaries as well as articles and books by later scholars.

Findings: Charles Chesnutt is the first black American author to ask his publishers for the freedom to treat social and racial issues from a black's perspective: issues such as racial intermarriage, the franchise, and convict labor practices. He also explored the ramifications of "passing" into white society and other problems

confronting people of mixed-race in the South and in the North. He pleaded for a quickening of conscience and for moral renewal in the hearts of Southern whites.

Conclusions: Chesnutt projects a sense of optimism for racial acceptance in The House Behind the Cedars and to a lesser degree in The Marrow of Tradition. However, his third novel, The Colonel's Dream reflects his frustration concerning the absence of meaningful change in the South in 1905. Negative responses by white supremacy groups and apathy on the part of Northern whites are two factors which led to his decline as an early twentieth-century novelist.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE FICTION

OF

CHARLES W. CHESNUTT

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CHAPTER ONE -- INTRODUCTION

Several authors attracted a readership of both blacks and whites in England and the United States during the second half of the nineteenth century. These authors saw literature as an instrument to be used as their voice of protest against an oppressive society. Literature was also the medium that allowed the black writer to serve as interpreter between the black and the white community.

The history of the black novel begins in 1853 with William Wells Brown's publication of Clotel; or, the President's Daughter in London. The Abolitionists trained Brown, a fugitive slave, to be a lecturer and writer. A Quaker family then aided him in his escape from slavery to go to London. He lived in London during the duration of the Fugitive Slave Law. Brown wrote Clotel . . . to arouse sympathy for the Abolitionist cause among the English. He believed that integration and assimilation were possible solutions for racial conflict because he saw that in the essentials no differences existed between races (Gayle 10).

Frank Webb, a member of Philadelphia's free colored population, wrote The Garies and Their Friends (1853). Bone writes, "He is concerned not with slavery but with caste, with the artificial barriers to success which confront the free Negro. He makes a frontal assault on

various sectors of the color line, attacking . . . the problems of mixed marriage, and discrimination in employment" (The Negro Novel . . . 31). He is concerned with the plight of freed men in the North: discrimination in restaurants, polling booths, and schools. Gayle states, "In terms of structure, character development, and theme, it is the finest production by a black writer between 1853 and 1900, the publication date of Charles Chesnutt's The House Behind the Cedars" (11).

Martin Delany's Blake, or the Huts of America (1859) survives only in fragmentary form. Delany's contribution to black fiction is his development of Blake as the first black revolutionary character in black fiction (Gayle 21). Bone notes that Delany sees slavery as an exploitative labor system (The Negro Novel . . . 30). Furthermore, Delany believes that the real struggle will have just begun after the Civil War is over, for then the task of rebuilding racial unity and of seeking social equality will begin.

A second novel focusing on caste relations appeared in 1892 in Francis E. W. Harper's Iola Leroy. It is, according to Bone, "a transitional work which combines elements of Abolitionism with incipient attacks on caste . . . her [Harper's] social consciousness, formed during the Abolitionist struggle, did not encompass

the post-Reconstruction repression" (The Negro Novel . . . 32).

Paul Laurence Dunbar and a contemporary, Charles W. Chesnutt, were the first black novelists to attract the attention of the white literary world. Dunbar, a son of former slaves, was born and raised in Dayton, Ohio. From 1895-1897 he published stories in Cosmopolitan, the Independent, and the New York Journal. Dodd, Mead, and Company then published his Folks from Dixie (1898). Bone states that this volume is the "first collection of short stories to be published by a black American" (Down Home . . . 47). He then published short story collections such as The Strength of Gideon (1900), In Old Plantation Days (1903), and The Heart of Happy Hollow (1904).

These collections of short stories contain thirty-one plantation tales that conform to and sustain the plantation school of thought. He endorses the plantation school because, as Bone states, "Protective mimicry is the key to Dunbar and his age. In the post-Reconstruction era, . . . enemies were . . . determined to reduce the blacks to something like their former state of servitude. . . . it often seemed [better] to blend with one's surroundings" (Down Home . . . 42).

Protective mimicry in Dunbar's short stories consists of imitating the plantation school. For

example, in Old Plantation Days Dunbar assists in the defamation of his own people. He presents degrading images of black life: blacks as irresponsible and incapable of self-government. Gayle notes that Dunbar "not only identified with whites emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually; all too often he sanctioned their evaluation of blacks" (40) in at least two of his novels, The Fanatics (1901) and The Sport of the Gods (1902).

The accommodation policy advocated by Booker T. Washington attracted Dunbar. This policy called for a renunciation of the blacks' claims to social equality and first-class citizenship. Consequently, only eight stories contain an element of protest against post-Reconstruction era repression.

Charles Chesnutt was the second black novelist and short story writer to attract the attention of the white literary world. A major contrast exists, however, between Dunbar and Chesnutt. Dunbar was content to reflect the social prejudices of his age; Chesnutt attempted to rise above the injustices and prejudices existing in the New South and sought to transform his culture.

Charles W. Chesnutt was born on June 20, 1858, in Cleveland, Ohio, to Andrew J. and Maria Sampson Chesnutt. His parents were free blacks who had moved

to the North from Fayetteville, North Carolina, before the Civil War began.

In 1866 the family moved back to Fayetteville. When Charles was fourteen, he assumed the position of pupil-teacher at the normal school for blacks in Fayetteville. After a brief period of teaching in Spartanburg, South Carolina, and a two and a half year period of teaching in Charlotte, he came back to Fayetteville in 1877 and became the assistant principal and later, in 1880, the principal of the normal school there (Scruggs 51-52).

In 1883 he moved to New York City and worked for six months as a reporter for the New York Mail and Express. Later in that year he moved to Cleveland. A railroad company hired him as a clerk and later as a stenographer for that firm's lawyer, Judge Williamson. He also studied law under Williamson's guidance, and he passed the Ohio bar examinations in 1887.

Already in 1880 Chesnutt pondered the possibility of becoming a writer. After he read Albion Tourgee's A Fool's Errand (1879), Chesnutt wondered if

a colored man, who has lived among colored people all his life, who is familiar with their habits, their ruling passions, their prejudices, their public and private ambitions, their religious tendencies, and habits, . . . and who besides had possessed

such opportunities for observation and conversation with the better class of white men in the South, as to understand their modes of thinking [would not be able to] write as good a book about the South as Judge Tourgee has written (H. M. Chesnutt 20).

On May 29, 1880, he wrote in his Journal:

I shall write for a purpose, a high, holy purpose, and this will inspire me to a greater effort. The object of my writings would not be so much the elevation of the colored people as the elevation of the whites--for I consider the unjust spirit of caste which is so insidious as to pervade a whole nation, and so powerful as to subject a whole race and all connected with it to scorn and social ostracism--I consider this a barrier to the moral progress of the American people, . . . This work is of a two-fold character. The Negro's part is to prepare himself for recognition and equality, and it is the province of literature to open the way for him to get it . . . If I can do anything to further this work, and can see any likelihood of obtaining success in it, I would gladly devote my life to it. (H. M. Chesnutt 21).

The publication of "The Goophered Grapevine" in the August 1887 issue of the Atlantic Monthly drew the attention of such authors as Tourgee and George Washington Cable to Chesnutt. Walter Hines Page, the editor of the Atlantic Monthly, encouraged Chesnutt to publish a collection of his "Uncle Julius" tales known as The Conjure Woman in 1899. He also published Frederick Douglass, a biography, and The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line in 1899.

Within the next few years Chesnutt published three novels of purpose: The House Behind the Cedars (1900), The Marrow of Tradition (1901), and The Colonel's Dream (1905).

Chesnutt's volumes of short stories--The Conjure Woman and The Wife of His Youth . . .--were not written in a cultural or literary vacuum. The popularity of local color stories began in the 1870s with the publication of Bret Harte's The Luck of Roaring Camp and Other Sketches. It was followed by the publication of Sarah Orne Jewett's Deephaven (1877), George Washington Cable's Old Creole Days (1879), Joel Chandler Harris' Mingo and Other Sketches in Black and White (1884), Thomas Nelson Page's In Ole Virginia (1887), and Hamlin Garland's Main-Travelled Roads (1891).

Furthermore, the seventeen years that Chesnutt spent in North Carolina supplied him with two important subjects: slavery and the Reconstruction South. As a

teacher he came into contact with emancipated slaves. He heard their tales of slavery times and their talk of magic and conjuration. He used this information to write The Conjure Woman. During these years he also witnessed the hardships and difficult circumstances of freedmen in the post-Reconstruction era.

Chesnutt's literary contributions are significant for several reasons. First, whereas Dunbar avoided controversy, Chesnutt is a pioneer in his problem/protest novels. He asked his publishers for the freedom to treat the color line from a black's perspective. For this reason his novels are of considerable historical significance.

Second, in contrast to Dunbar's romantic trait, Chesnutt's dominant technique is social realism. His focus is on setting and on social issues. He dramatizes social issues such as intermarriage between races, the convict lease system, and the rights of blacks to vote and to receive an education. He is also recognized for his use of satire. His gift for satire, for example, is evident in The Wife of His Youth . . . as he satirizes the color prejudices of the black middle class in Cleveland. His role as satirist is a major contribution to Afro-American literature.

Third, Chesnutt's fiction is significant in that major characters in The Wife of His Youth . . . and in his three novels are involved in moral decisions that

will greatly affect their futures. Chesnutt's fiction reflects a characteristic of William Dean Howells' fiction, for his main characters also make moral decisions in The Rise of Silas Lapham (1884), A Modern Instance (1881), and A Hazzard of New Fortunes (1889).

Fourth, as a black, he writes in response to the fiction of authors such as Thomas Nelson Page, Thomas Dixon, and Joel Chandler Harris. These authors were intent on proving that blacks were undeserving of the status of citizenship or of recognition as human beings. Page's characters, for example, demonstrate docility, loyalty, and subservience. Furthermore, their fiction pointed out that what is at stake in the post-Reconstruction era is not only political, social, and economic control of the South but the institution of quasi-slavery to replace chattel slavery. Chesnutt's fiction challenges a culture dominated by the myth of black inferiority and white superiority. He is uncompromising in his opposition to anything that threatened the dignity of the black. When Page idealized relationships between faithful slaves and their masters, Chesnutt responded by publishing The Conjure Woman.

Fifth, during the post-Reconstruction era Page's and Dixon's portrayal of the black as "brute" Negro in Red Rock, The Klansman, and The Leopard's Spots established the rationale for the systematic execution

of the black by white men. Chesnutt offers a different perspective of the black in both his short stories and in his novels of purpose. He explores their individual problems and their individual needs as sensitive human beings in a sometimes hostile environment.

Sixth, Chesnutt's fiction is significant in that he presents a portrayal of persons of mixed-race which contrasts with that given by Dixon and Page. Starke states that Chesnutt is relevant for his portrayal of the problem of identity for persons of mixed-race in 1900 (98). She continues, "In The House Behind the Cedars (1900) Chesnutt achieves a higher level of perception about this subject [mixed-race] than any other writer prior to James Weldon Johnson in The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man (1912)" (98). Gayle writes, "The major objective of his fiction, therefore, is to plead the case of the mulatto before his white audience . . . to counteract" (48) portrayals of the person of mixed-race prevalent in the literature of his time. The House Behind the Cedars is, according to Gayle, "the first novel by an African-American to deal with the ramifications of caste upon whites and blacks; it is an important novel" (50).

In his fiction Chesnutt is a realist who recognizes that literature is a strong social and moral force in society and that his fiction could effect positive changes in a society. For example, Chesnutt's plea in

The House Behind the Cedars, unlike that of Dunbar in The Sport of the Gods, is that society can be changed. Therefore I see a major difference in the perception of two black contemporaries, Chesnutt and Dunbar. In addition, Chesnutt senses that the central issues of life tend to be ethical, that is, issues of conduct and practice in society. He has a strong belief that many Americans were morally ready to hear a black author's realistic voice on racial matters. His goal, then, is a moral revolution based on the "elevation of the whites." For this reason he wrote novels such as The House Behind the Cedars and The Marrow of Tradition. He is indebted to George Washington Cable who revealed moral courage in dealing with socially controversial themes in his Old Creole Days. Dunbar, however, did not present a serious literary portrait of the black. He did not address main problems and issues facing the black novelist in 1900.

Consequently Chesnutt's literary focus is on social and moral issues of the post-Civil War era as well as on the injustices of the pre-Civil War era. His focus on poverty and the plight of the poor whites and blacks in The Colonel's Dream (1905) and The House Behind the Cedars (1900) parallels Theodore Dreiser's focus on the needs of the poor in New York in Sister Carrie (1900). Chesnutt's focus on big issues such as the cruelties of slavery, the laws concerning intermarriage between races

and the "passing" of persons of mixed-race into white society parallels Frank Norris' focus on big issues such as the power of the railroad and the stature of the farmer in The Octopus (1901).

His technique is to create character stereotypes and predictable plots which fit his purpose. He uses his characters to convey social truths concerning the South. For example, he uses Uncle Julius in The Conjure Woman stories to communicate his perspective on slavery practices, a Martha Chandler and a Mary Myrover to promote a system of public education for blacks in the South, a John Walden in The House Behind the Cedars to defend the practice of "passing" into white society, a Major Carteret and a Dr. William Miller in The Marrow of Tradition to present opposing racial perspectives, and a Colonel French in The Colonel's Dream to convey Chesnutt's vision for economic and social reform in the South. He also uses stereotypes to counteract hostile stereotypes of racist authors.

His fiction gives a differing perspective to that of writers such as Joel Chandler Harris, Thomas Nelson Page, and Thomas Dixon, who advocate racist policies and continuing segregation practices.

In Chapter Two I will present evidence from the plantation tradition fiction of Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page to demonstrate that these authors tended to idealize relationships existing between slave

and master and to idealize the benefits for slaves in the pre-Civil War era. Evidence will also be presented from Thomas Dixon's fiction to show his criticism of federal Reconstruction efforts in the South as well as to develop his negative portrayal of blacks as a race to be shunned and feared by Southern whites.

In Chapter Three I will analyze the short stories of Chesnutt to show his portrayal of the harsh realities of life as a slave in the pre-Civil War era. His fiction also portrays interpersonal relationships existing between persons of mixed-race and other blacks, blacks toward other blacks, and blacks and persons of mixed-race toward Southern and Northern white people. This chapter will also present, through one novel, his perspective on issues facing blacks and persons of mixed-race in the South such as racial intermarriage and "passing" into white society.

In Chapter Four I will present an analysis of two novels which demonstrate Chesnutt's growing sense of pessimism for racial progress and understanding as he focuses on the privilege of franchise, continuing segregation in the schools and libraries, and the convict lease system. This analysis also presents his vision of what it means to be a black in a white-dominated culture.

I prepared this analysis with the hope that it will contribute to a better understanding of fiction written

during the post-Civil War era and will enlarge the reader's perspective concerning social problems and racial issues present in the South.

CHAPTER TWO -- AN ANALYSIS OF PLANTATION
TRADITION FICTION

Immediately following the Civil War, the United States faced some of the most complex problems in its history as a nation. An entire social and economic system in the South was in ruins. Confederate soldiers returned home to find "their women and children sick and undernourished, their dwellings devastated or plundered, . . . their slaves released from further obligation as bondmen, . . . and considerable private property . . . seized by Federal authorities" (Gloster 3).

Furthermore, the Freedmen Bureau's efforts to grant the blacks educational opportunities in the schools and legal rights in the courts increased the efforts of Southern whites to keep the former slave states a "white man's country." White supremacy groups maintained control through the formation of the Ku Klux Klan in 1865.

Black suffrage became a key concern in the Southern states. In 1890 Mississippi denied suffrage to the majority of her black citizens by establishing literacy standards and instituting the poll tax as prerequisites for voting. South Carolina took similar steps in 1895. States such as North Carolina, Virginia, Alabama, Georgia, and Oklahoma virtually eliminated blacks from

the electorate. White supremacy groups thus succeeded in diminishing the political strength of the blacks.

Several writers during this period tended to be nostalgic and idealistic concerning relationships between slaves and their masters. Thus their fiction portrayed slaves as contented and docile individuals. In contrast, blacks who advocated social and political rights were often portrayed as brute beasts.

Concerning this fiction, Gloster notes, "Running parallel to the suppression and disfranchisement of the Negro were the literary misrepresentations of the black man by the plantation school of Thomas Nelson Page and the racist cult of Thomas Dixon" (7).

For example, Thomas Nelson Page's collection of short stories, In Ole Virginia (1887), uses three black men--Sam, Uncle Edinburg, and Uncle Billy--to emphasize the benefits of slavery. Sam states in "Marse Chan":

Den wuz good ole times, marster--de bes' Sam ever see! Dey was in fac'! Niggers didn't need nothing' 'tall to do--jes had to 'ten' to de feedin' an' cleanin' de hosses, an' doin' what de marster tell 'em to do, an' when dey wuz sick, dey had things sont 'em out de house, an' de same doctor come to see 'em whar 'ten' to de white folks when dey wuz po'ly, Dyar warn' no trouble nor nothin' (10).

Furthermore, Sam's master risked his life to save Ham Fisher when he was trapped in the burning stables, losing his eyesight in that incident. Later when Marse Chan returned home from college, Sam says, "He sut'n'y wuz good to me. Nothin nuver made no difference 'bout dat. He nuver hit me a lick in his life--an' nuver let nobody else do it nurr" (15).

In Page's "Unc' Edinburg's Drowndin'," Unc' praises his master, Marse George, "He sutney set a heap o' sto' by me; an' I 'ain' nuver see nobody yit wuz good to me as Marse George" (41).

Portraying contrasts between the present Christmas season and those in past years, Unc' exclaims,

"Dese heah free-issue niggers don' know what Christmas is. Hawg meat an' pop crackers don' meck Christmas. Hit tecks ole times to meck a sho'-nough, tyahin'-down Christmas. Gord! I's seen 'em! Oh! nuttin' warn' too good for niggers dem times; an' de little niggers wuz runnin' roun' right 'strac ted. . . . Dis nigger ain' nuver gwine forgit it" (67).

The love and loyalty existing between slave and master is also seen in this account. Marse George risked his life to save Unc' from drowning. Unc' explains, "An' den dee tell me 'bout how when I hollered Marse George tun back an' struck out for me for life, an' how jes as I went down de last time he

cotch me an' helt on to me tell we wash down to whar de bank curve . . ." (75).

In "Meh Lady: A Story of the War," Page ignores the realities of the economic and social conditions present in the South after the Civil War: extreme poverty, ruined plantations, and homeless freedmen. Uncle Billy says, "Lord! suh, hit cyars me back so sometimes, I mos' furgit de ain' nuver been no war nor nuttin'" (79). Later he reflects, "I wuz sittin in de do' wid meh pipe, and heah 'em settin' on de front steps, dee voices soun'in low bees an' de moon sort o' mellow over de yard, an' I sort o' got to studyin' an' hit pear like de plantation live once mo', an' de ain' no mo' scufflin', an' de ol times done come back agin" (138).

Billy also lavishes praise on Mis Hannah: "She wuz de' light o' dis plantation! When she'd come in you' house 'twuz like you'd shove back de winder an' let piece o' de sun in on de flo'--you could almos' see by her!" (79).

The owner's love for her slave is also portrayed here. When Uncle Billy wishes to pay "Meh Lady" the rent, she refuses to accept it. Billy states, "She say she owe us ev'ything in de wull, an' she know we jes' stayin' wid 'em 'cause dee helpless, and sich things . . ." (116).

Concerning Thomas Page's idealism, Gloster writes:

In such volumes as In Ole Virginia or Marse Chan and Other Stories, ... and Social Life in Old Virginia, Page adopting a condescending and smiling attitude, creates an appealing plantation scene. On a broad canvas he paints a stately mansion presided over by lovely ladies and gallant gentlemen. . . . The attitude of these cavaliers toward their slaves is cordial, kindly, benign, and sometimes devoted. The contented bondmen appear proudly engaged as servants in the big house or as laborers in the fields. . . . Particularly emphasized is the loyal relationship between master and servant, the mistress and maid (8).

This idealism is portrayed through the characters of Uncle Billy, Sam, Uncle Edinburg, Marse George, Marse Chan, and Miss Hannah.

In Page's Red Rock (1898) the benefits of slavery as well as the love and loyalty present between slave and master are evident. For example, Dr. Cary asks his aged body servant, "Tarquin, do you want to be free? . . . If you do I will set you free, and give you money enough to live in Philadelphia." Tarquin replies, "No, suh; Marster, you know I don't wan' be free" (41).

Joel Chandler Harris presents a similarly sentimental portrait of Southern plantation life. He spent four years living at Turnwold, a 1000 acre plantation where he became close friends with two blacks--Uncle George Terrell and Old Harbert. These men later served as Harris' pattern for his fictional Uncle Remus.

In 1880 Harris wrote Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings. His purpose was "to try to preserve the old plantation way of life which had been lost when the Civil War was lost" (Bickley 63).

This purpose is evident in his fiction. For example, his main character, Uncle Remus, has nothing but pleasant memories of the discipline of slavery. He states, "Dem wuz great times, mon, . . . Dey mos 'sholy wuz" (500). Remus is portrayed as a "venerable, pampered Negro with a gift for quaint philosophizing and for poetic speech, having (or allowed to have) only pleasant memories . . ." (Brown 53).

For example, Remus is assigned to driving the carriage and to keeping things straight around the house. He is contented with his position in life, "You er what you is, en you can't be no is-er. I'm what I am en I can't be no am-er. It all done been fix, en I ain't see nobody yit what can onfix it" (Harris 512).

Remus, too, shows affection to members of his master's household. A devoted slave, he cares for Miss

Sally as a child. In turn, the family shows affection and respect toward him.

In "Free Joe and the Rest of the World," Harris presents the main character, Free Joe, as the "humblest, the simplest, and most serious of all God's living creatures ... a black atom, drifting hither and thither without an owner, blown about by the winds of circumstance, and given over to shiftlessness" (Free Joe 1). His condition, Harris writes, was "so much worse than that of the negroes around him,--negroes who had friends because they had masters . . . he was an exile--slaves despised him" (8). His situation as a freedman made him subject to the Black Codes as well. He is not accepted as an equal by whites, nor is he accepted by fellow blacks.

The concept, that being a slave is more desirable than being a freeman, is seen in a second story, "Little Compton." Jake, a black, gives his opinion as to whether or not blacks would like to be free. He exclaims, "I don't speck dey would, kause all de free niggers w'at I ever seed is de mos' no-countes' niggers in de lan'" (36).

Harris develops the theme of devotion and love for plantation owners in his "Azalia." Mammy, an old black, expresses her love and affection for Miss Hallie. She proudly states, ". . . I use ter tote Miss Hallie 'roun'

w'en she wuz a little bit er baby . . . , I wish ter de Lord I uz gwine 'long wid you . . ." (Free Joe 151).

Brown rightly notes that "Harris never came fully to grips with the reality of the South or of Negro experience . . . his fiction almost always glorified the faithful self-denying slave of the old South, for whom the old ways of slavery were the best" (57). Harris ignores the injustice of the pre-war slave codes and uses Uncle Remus and other main characters to serve as spokesmen for presenting and defending orthodox Southern attitudes.

Both Thomas Nelson Page and Thomas Dixon wrote novels that portray their hatred of blacks and their disgust with federal Reconstruction programs.

In Red Rock Page defends the traditions of the "Old South," criticizes carpetbagger officials such as Jonadab Leech, black politicians such as Moses, as well as the activities of the Freedmen's Bureau. For example, Page describes Leech as "a vampire, sucking the life-blood of the people" (564), as a "shameless dog" (577), and as a tiger (485). He also defends the formation of the Ku Klux Klan, the Invisible Empire, as a necessary force to counteract the carpetbag government. Page also idealizes Southern aristocrats such as Dr. Cary for their nobility in adverse as well as in prosperous times.

Thomas Dixon published two novels--The Leopard's Spots (1902) and The Clansman (1905)--to attack political and social reforms made by the federal government in the Reconstruction era. Dixon commented that "The Leopard's Spots was the statement in historical outline of the conditions from the enfranchisement of the Negro to his disfranchisement" (Gloster 10). His prejudice toward blacks is very evident. He describes freed blacks as "a possible Beast to be feared and guarded" (The Leopard's Spots 5), as "simple-hearted children of nature" (The Leopard's Spots 40), as "black apes" (The Leopard's Spots 149), and as "those who have no souls" (The Leopard's Spots 179).

Furthermore, Dixon projects an image of blacks that resulted in misunderstanding and distrust. For example, blacks are described as desirous of white wives in The Leopard's Spots. Tim states, "I expect to lead a fair white bride into my home before another year, and have poor white aristocrats to tend my lawn" (146).

Dixon also depicts blacks as roving criminals and rapists. For example, Tom instructs Flora, his daughter, "... don't you dare go nigh er nigger, or let one get nigh you no more'n you would a rattlesnake" (The Leopard's Spots 370). The Preacher warns, "One drop of Negro blood makes a Negro. It kinks the hair,

flattens the nose, thickens the lips, puts out the light of intellect, and lights the fire of brutal passions" (The Leopard's Spots 244).

White supremacy is a major theme in Gaston's convention speech. He affirms, "We believe that God raised up our race, as he ordained Israel of old, in this world crisis, to establish and maintain for weaker races, a trust for civilization, the principles of civil and religious Liberty and the forms of Constitutional Government" (The Leopard's Spots 439).

Dixon echoes Page's idealistic portrayal in his short stories concerning the loyalty of slaves to their masters. He uses the Preacher to voice his opinion, "In the olden days I used to preach to your people. I saw before me many men of character: carpenters, bricklayers, . . . farmers, faithful home servants that loved their masters and were faithful unto death. Now I see a cheap lot of thieves and jailbirds . . ." (311).

Like Page, Dixon defends the traditions and culture of the "Old South," describing slavery as a "mild form of servitude in which the Negro had plenty to eat and wear, never suffered from cold, slept soundly, and reared his children in droves with never a thought for the morrow" (401).

Page's condemnation of Reconstruction policies in Red Rock is seconded by Dixon in his second novel, The Clansman. In the Foreward he writes that this novel

"develops the true story of the Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy, which overturned the Reconstruction regime."

Dixon views the South as being "under a cloud darker than the dust and smoke of blood-soaked battlefields--the Black Plague of Reconstruction" (179). He adds, "These Reconstruction Acts, conceived in sin and brought forth in iniquity, can only bring shame and disgrace until the last trace of them is wiped from our laws" (215).

Throughout the novel he suggests that the Reconstruction government is in chaos and that "barbarism [is] strangling civilization by brute force . . . [It is] a tragedy as deep and dark as was ever woven of the blood and tears of a conquered people" (267).

Dixon's perspective is that peace will come to the South only when Southern whites return to a position of power and the black returned to a position of serfdom. Consequently, he saw Reconstructionist policies as "an attempt to establish with the bayonet an African barbarism on the ruins of Southern society; . . . a conspiracy against human progress" (Gross 79). Reconstruction policies took power away from Southern aristocrats, and therefore Dixon encouraged opposition to Reconstruction officials.

Dixon describes blacks as bestial creatures in The Clansman. For example, when Phil meets a black soldier on the street, he notes that the soldier "had the short, heavy-set neck of the lower order of animals. His skin was coal black, . . . His nose was flat . . . The sinister bead eyes, with brown splotches in their whites, were set wide apart and gleamed apeline under his scant brows" (216). Furthermore, when Gus broke into Mrs. Lenoir's home to rape Marion, her daughter, he hands the rope to "another brute" to tie "de ole one ter de bedpost" (313).

Within this framework of belief, I believe that Dixon presents no possibility for racial harmony, social justice, or political justice for the black in the South. For example, Dr. Cameron, father of Ben Cameron, the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, states emphatically, "The grant of the ballot to these millions of semi-savages and the riot of debauchery which has followed are crimes against human progress . . . Suffrage is but the new paper cloak with which the Demagogue has sought to hide the issue" (291).

Furthermore, when the Klan crushes the Republican and black government, Ben Cameron exclaims, "Civilization has been saved, and the South redeemed from shame" (374).

In their plantation tradition fiction, Harris and Page distort relationships between slave and master.

Although their short stories contain the realism of speech and custom, this realism was subordinated to the purpose of showing loyalty between the races. Both writers describe black characters at their best in relationship with kindly Southern whites.

In their novels both writers view blacks as brutes, as creatures to be feared, hated, and despised. Both portray blacks as roving bands of criminals and beyond the control of law agencies. Both attack the intermarriage of races.

Their fiction is a combination of realism and racist ideology. Both writers criticize the Reconstruction policies of the federal government and portray federal officials as self-centered, power-hungry bureaucrats. Through federal policies and actions, Southern landowners lose their farms, and the foundations of the Old South are weakened. Both writers supported the Ku Klux Klan by viewing it as a necessary counter-agent to the Reconstruction efforts of the federal government.

Joel Chandler Harris was certainly not as radical in his perspective of the black as the perspectives given by Page and Dixon in Red Rock, The Clansman, and The Leopard's Spots. Yet he builds a case for slavery in his description of Free Joe's situation. He portrays Free Joe as being in a worse position now than when he was a slave. Thus he perpetuates the pro-slavery

perspective. He desires to create a sympathetic and untroubled portrait of plantation life before the Civil War. In contrast, Chesnutt's The Conjure Woman rejects Harris' endorsement of slavery and exposes the cruelties of chattel slavery. Through these tales Chesnutt attempts to shake his white readers from their moral lethargy. These accounts are an extension of the Abolitionist fiction written by Brown and Delany.

Concerning the plantation tradition fiction of Page, Dixon, and Harris, Chesnutt believes that it is his purpose as a realist to present a differing perspective of racial conditions in the South. I define his work as a realist because he desires to present racial tensions, and racial injustices such as the loss of franchise, and alienation faced by persons of mixed-race as he views them. He also believes that it is his duty to analyze the effects of a hostile environment upon the human personality.

I classify him as a social realist because he seeks to dramatize social attitudes and social problems that created tensions among blacks and whites. Therefore his technique is to develop characters that embody the social attitudes which he seeks to uphold or to reform. For example, when Dixon develops the character of Lydia Brown, a person of mixed-race, in The Clansman, he presents her as a menace to society. Chesnutt presents a differing perspective of a person of

mixed-race in the character of Dr. Adam Miller in The Marrow of Tradition. Chesnutt portrays him as a man of reason and compassion, as one who overcomes antagonism with strength and intelligence. This is significant for Chesnutt's plea is that those in power would look over the barriers erected by history and tradition, put aside their hatred and prejudices, and create a better environment for all races in the South. Thus his literature assumes sociological dimensions.

I classify Chesnutt as a realist in writing The Conjure Woman for I note the absence of sentimentality toward a past society in this work. This distinguishes his work from that of Harris in his Uncle Remus accounts and from Page's stories in In Ole Virginia. The ideal relationship portrayed, for example, in the relationship between Uncle Billy and Miss Hannah and the sentimental perspectives of Uncle Billy and Uncle Edinburg concerning the pre-Civil War South is notably absent in The Conjure Woman as I will develop in more detail in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER THREE -- AN ANALYSIS OF THE FICTION OF
CHARLES W. CHESNUTT: HIS HOPE FOR THE SOUTH

Reviewing the literary treatment and national status of the black near the end of the nineteenth century, Chesnutt states in his article "Post-Bellum--Pre-Harlem":

Thomas Dixon was writing the Negro down industriously and with success. Thomas Nelson Page was disguising the harshness of slavery under the mask of sentiment. The trend of public sentiment at the moment was distinctly away from the Negro. He had not developed any real political or business standing; socially he was an outcast. . . on the whole, he was a small frog in a large pond, and there was a feeling of pessimism in regard to his future (Adler 51).

As a response Chesnutt published many pieces of short fiction, one biography, a number of essays, and three novels between 1885 and 1930. Edwin Mims states in his article "Thomas Nelson Page" that writers such as Chesnutt, in their reacting to the idyllic plantation life portrait, reveal the "darker side of slavery--the old master's extravagance and overbearing haughtiness, . . . the hopeless degradation of the poor whites, the slaves . . . bullied by overseer or

frightened by the prospect of being transferred to the lower South" (114).

Instead of portraying blacks as contented slaves, Chesnutt wished to show their true emotions resulting from actual events in their lives.

In 1890 Chesnutt told George Washington Cable that the magazines wanted stories that reworked stale material about the loyal darky servant. However, Chesnutt states, "I can't write about those people, or rather I won't write about them." He hoped that he would not "have to drop the attempt at realism" (Scruggs 5-6).

In 1899 Chesnutt published seven short stories in The Conjure Woman as a response to the fiction of Harris and Page. The historical setting is the pre-Civil War era, and the stories have their geographical setting in the Cape Fear area of North Carolina. He uses the character of Uncle Julius to show plantation life from the slaves' point-of-view, as a "darker side of slavery." Uncle Julius serves as the moral voice for Chesnutt.

Andrews believes that Chesnutt wrote many of his conjure stories with a "revisionist motive in mind and with a desire to undercut the minstrel stereotype through the characterization of Uncle Julius. . . . His antagonists in the plantation school of fiction had unjustly denigrated the freedman almost as much as

they had falsely eulogized the slave in Chesnutt's view" (The Literary Career 77). Chesnutt's fiction portrays the slaves as victims of racial and moral injustice. For example, the emotional pain suffered by separated slave families or by sweethearts is seen in three stories in The Conjure Woman: "Po' Sandy," "Sis Becky's Pickaninny," and "Hot-Foot Hannibal."

In "Po Sandy" Sandy is an excellent worker on Marse Marrabo McSwayne's plantation. When McSwayne's children marry, each of them desires to have Sandy as a laborer on his land for a month or two. On one occasion when Sandy is gone, McSwayne sells Sandy's wife to a speculator. Uncle Julius relates:

W'en Sandy come back, Mars Marrabo gin'im a dollar, en 'lowed he wuz monst'us sorry fer ter break up de fambly, but de spekilater had gin'im big boot, en times wuz hard en money skase. . . . Sandy tuk on some 'bout losin' his wife, but soon seed dey want no use cryin' ober spilt merlasses . . . (42-43)

In this way Uncle Julius exposes the injustice of a slave owner and portrays the humanity of the slave.

In "Sis Becky's Pickaninny" Becky is a field hand owned by Colonel Pendleton. Becky's husband is owned by a neighbor and works on his plantation. When the owner dies, Uncle Julius relates that "his lan' and his niggers had ter be sol' for ter pay his debts" (137).

Pendleton wishes to purchase Becky's husband, but he can't since he had lost money at the horse races. Her husband is sold to someone in Virginia. Becky's grief is lessened a bit by the fact that she still has her baby to love and cherish.

Pendleton trades Becky for a horse, but her new master doesn't want to be bothered with her young son. He states, "I doan raise niggers; I raise horses, en I doan wanten to both'rin wid no nigger babies . . . niggers is made to wuk, en dey ain' got no time fer sich foolis'ness ez babies" (142). Becky is heartbroken when she realizes she will never see her son again.

Chesnutt also portrays the insensitivity of a slave owner in "Hot-Foot Hannibal." Two slaves, Cloe and Jeff, love each other very much, but Mars Dugal "tuk Jeff ter town . . . en sol' im' ter de spekilater, who sta'ted down de ribber wid 'im nex' mawnin' on a steamboat, fer ter take 'im ter Alabama" (219). Later when Dugal wanted to buy Jeff back, he learns that Jeff had fallen or jumped off the steamboat and drowned. Chesnutt's point is that death is to be preferred to separation from a loved one.

Chesnutt portrays several evils of the slave system--physical abuse, meager diets, a lack of understanding of the black as a human being--through the narration of Uncle Julius in "Mars Jeems's

Nightmare." These evils are seen from the victims' perspectives.

Mars Jeems McLean is a strict plantation owner. Julius relates that he "nebber 'peared ter hab no feelin' fer nobody" (70). When his father, Mars John McLean, dies, the conditions grew so bad that "dey wuz no use in libbin' at all ef you ha' ter lib roun' Mars Jeems" (71). He provides only a meager diet, and the slaves were not allowed to sing, dance, or play the banjo when he was on the plantation.

Jeems stated that he bought his slaves to work and not to play. He allowed no courting. If a slave complained about anything, "dey got fo'ty" (72).

Furthermore, Jeems' overseer, Nick Johnson, was harder on the slaves than even Mars Jeems had been. Nick made "de tasks bigger en de rashuns littler . . ." (79).

Chesnutt gives his perspective concerning the Uncle Julius tales by stating, ". . . even the wildest was not without an element of pathos,--the tragedy, it might be, of the story itself; the shadow, never absent, of slavery and ignorance; the sadness, always, of life seen by the fading light of an old man's memory" (The Conjure Woman 168).

In The Conjure Woman, Chesnutt conveys a perspective concerning the black and the practice of slavery that is significantly different from that of

Harris and Page. He portrays slaves' sorrow, their pain, and their heartache as human beings. John Durham in a letter to Chesnutt on May 9, 1899, notes that he [Chesnutt] tried to treat all characters as "real, live, natural human [beings] and not [as] the creations of books" (Charles Chesnutt 61). For example, Chesnutt's characters are people of emotional depth: the slaves Tenie in "Po Sandy" and Cloe in "Hot-Foot Hannibal" love their sweethearts so intensely that they lose their willpower to live when they are separated from their loved ones. Sis Becky is very devoted to her son, Mose, and he to her; both suffer emotional pain when Becky is sold. The anguish of the slaves owned by Mars Jeems was noted earlier. As Andrews writes, "In Chesnutt's conjure stories the most disturbing aspect of slavery is not the possibilities of physical abuse, which occurs very rarely, but the likelihood of a more profound threat to a slave's dignity, his capacity to feel, his human identity" ("The Significance" 94).

Chesnutt in The Conjure Woman exposes the sordid side of the plantation with the folk tale, the same literary form that was frequently chosen to portray the black as a contented bondman and as an inferior being in plantation tradition fiction.

After the publication of The Conjure Woman in 1899, Chesnutt was encouraged to publish The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line in the same year.

In a letter to Houghton Mifflin dated December 12, 1899, he states that his purpose in writing The Wife of His Youth . . . was to focus attention on "certain aspects of the race question which are quite familiar to those on the unfortunate side of it" but ignored and unknown by others.

Concerning the title of this volume of short stories, Chesnutt wrote to Houghton Mifflin on August 23, 1899, "I should like to hope that the stories, while written to depict life as it is, in certain aspects that no one has ever before attempted to adequately describe, may throw a light upon the great problem [the color line] on which the stories are strung" (H. M. Chesnutt 116).

The Conjure Woman, as a short story collection, has its setting in the rural South, but now Chesnutt focuses on racial problems that exist also in Northern urban settings such as Cleveland.

After dealing with the slaves' lack of control over their lives, Chesnutt now turns to the "emotional and highly explosive subjects of racism, intermarriage, the problem of 'passing', and racial distinction and prejudice within the black community itself" (Wintz 126). Render notes that he exposes the realities of the color line and castigates "the color line bias or class bias which knows no Mason-Dixon line, expressed in acts of discrimination and injustice both between and within

racial groups" (Charles Chesnutt 38). This perspective concerning color line bias or class bias is emphasized in each story.

In each story Chesnutt develops the conflicts in the plot so that the main character is confronted with a moral choice. Each moral choice develops from a situation involving a color bias. The main character must choose to "rise" above the situation for racial prejudice or discrimination or be guilty of advancing the case for continued racial inequality in the South or in the North. For example, in the first story, "The Wife of His Youth," Chesnutt cleverly exposes the color bias of members of the Blue Veins in Groveland [Cleveland]. The Blue Veins is composed of individuals who are more white than black. If one is "white enough to show blue veins," (1) he or she is eligible for membership.

Chesnutt writes, "There were those who had been known to assail it violently as a glaring example of the very prejudice from which the colored race had suffered most" (2). However, Mr. Ryder, one of the main characters, states, "I have no race prejudice, . . . but we people of mixed blood are ground between the upper and nether millstone. Our fate lies between absorption by the white race and extinction in the black. The one doesn't want us yet, but may take us in time" (7).

Mr. Ryder is to serve as host at an elaborate ball at which he plans to announce his engagement to Mrs. Dixon. That afternoon, however, he is visited by a black woman who shares with him her efforts to locate her husband, a person of mixed-race, whom she has not seen for twenty-five years.

Ryder now realizes that his visitor is his wife from pre-Civil War years. He observes her fidelity and devotion to her husband. He must now make a moral choice: to ignore his past and marry Mrs. Dixon or to admit his past and reveal his identity to the stranger. Ultimately he has the moral courage to reveal his identity and later that day introduces "the wife of his youth" to his guests. He follows the law of moral obligation; he is able to transcend color and culture. His wife will not be an asset to him in his relationships with his current Blue Veins friends. He will now be ostracized by them. Ryder serves as the moral voice for Chesnutt, as it is his view that color should be ignored in any judgment of an individual.

In "Her Virginia Mammy" Chesnutt focuses upon the result of racial intermarriage. In this story Miss Clara Hohfelder, adopted as a child by a German couple, is reluctant to marry John Winthrop until she can obtain some information about her family's history.

One day she visits with Mrs. Harper, a black friend. Clara shares with her her keen desire to know

about her real family. As she relates details of the steamboat accident that may have taken her parents' lives, she didn't see "the expression that sprang into the other's face,--a look in which hope struggled with fear, and yearning love with both--nor the strong effort with which Mrs. Harper controlled herself . . ." (46). When Clara shows Mrs. Harper a child's slip with the monogram "M. S." stitched on it, Mrs. Harper realizes that Clara is her daughter.

Like Mr. Ryder, she must now make a moral choice: to tell Clara that she is her natural mother, reclaim her, and thus shatter Clara's dreams of marrying John Winthrop, or to tell Clara that she was a mammy who accompanied Clara's family on the ship. She decides to sacrifice her future happiness for her daughter's happiness. She makes what Heermance calls is "painful and courageous dissemblance" (172). She truthfully tells Clara that her father was a Virginia gentleman and a university graduate and then falsely states that her mother was from one of the first families of Virginia. Mrs. Harper recalls how she, though free, was taken to New Orleans and sold as a slave.

Winthrop notes the physical resemblance between Mrs. Harper and Clara. He too must make a moral choice: to make public what is the true relationship or to remain silent. He responds willingly to the appealing glance of Mrs. Harper to remain silent and

allow Clara to believe Mrs. Harper's story. He still wishes to marry Clara even though she is a person of mixed-race. His decision indicates that Chesnutt offers a glimmer of hope that persons of mixed-race will be accepted by whites into the main stream of American society.

This moral choice by Winthrop is very difficult for him to make because earlier in the account he had commented to Clara about the difficult role for persons of mixed-race in American society. He states, "One would think . . . that the whitest of them would find their position so painful and more or less pathetic; to be so white and yet to be classed as black . . ." (39). His willingness to marry Clara is a sign of progress for acceptance of all races in the United States.

"The Sheriff's Children" is one of Chesnutt's bitter stories. Captain Walker, an elderly resident of Troy, North Carolina, has been murdered. Sheriff Campbell brings to the jail a young man of mixed-race who is accused of murdering Walker.

Emotions run high in the village; cries of "lynch him" and "he oughter be burnt" fill the air. However, the sheriff vows that the accused will have a proper trial. This vow by the sheriff also involves a moral choice: to protect the accused or to allow the mob to have its way.

In the jail the young man informs the sheriff that he is his son, Tom, whom the sheriff sired in an act of fornication with his slave, Cicely, later selling her with her child to a speculator to pay off some debts. Tom bitterly asks the sheriff, "What father's duty have you ever performed for me? Did you give me your name, or even your protection? . . . you sold me to the rice swamps" (85).

Chesnutt uses the character of Tom to portray the plight of persons of mixed-race in the South: "Free in name, but despised and scorned and set aside by the people to whose race I belong far more than to my mother's" (86). He adds, "I learned to feel that no degree of learning or wisdom will change the color of my skin and that I shall always wear what in my own country is a badge of degradation. . . . I do not care particularly for such a life" (87). Through Tom Chesnutt emphasizes the plight of persons of mixed-race as part of his pledge to "depict life as it is."

Tom's attempt to kill his father emphasizes Chesnutt's point that Tom is willing to kill his white father to avenge the injustices of the past and to escape from the jail to avoid certain death by the mob or by the court system.

The sheriff's conscience bothers him greatly; he reflects upon possible options that he could have exercised on behalf of Tom. He hopes that his son may

be acquitted and that a plan be prepared by which he, as father, can atone for his crime against his son. The sheriff again makes a moral choice: he decides to assist his son in the future. It would be very easy to abandon him at this time.

That night, however, Tom tears off the bandages from his arm wound and bleeds to death. Chesnutt's point is that suicide is preferable to living as an alleged murderer who faces death. Through suicide Tom symbolizes his rejection of living as a person of mixed-race in a white-dominated world.

An excellent example of Chesnutt's attack against racial bias within the black community is his story, "A Matter of Principle." The first sentence of this account could well be Chesnutt's plea in much of his fiction: "What our country needs most in its treatment of the race problem . . . is a clearer conception of the brotherhood of man" (94). Chesnutt develops this concept of racial bias through the prejudice and actions of the main characters.

Cicero Clayton, a member of the Blue Vein Society, made the above observation. He was quick, however, to disassociate himself from the black race. He states, "I know . . . that the white people lump us all together as blacks, and condemn us all to the same social ostracism.

But I don't accept this classification, for my part, . . ." (94-95).

In actions Clayton, like Mr. Ryder, "declined to associate to any considerable extent with black people" (96). Furthermore, his daughter Alice was nearly white and would not marry a black man.

She receives a letter from Congressman Hamilton M. Brown; in it he requests permission to visit Alice in Groveland. Her father's response is "if this man is black, we don't want to encourage him. If he is the right sort, we'll invite him to the house" (108). Consequently, an elaborate reception is planned for his visit.

However, at the Union depot Clayton mistakenly identifies a very black Bishop H. M. Brown with "African" features to be Congressman Hamilton Brown. Consequently Brown is told that the reception in his honor is cancelled. Clayton states, "No sacrifice is too great to escape having to entertain him; of course I have no prejudice against his color,--he can't help that,--but it is the principle of the thing. If we received him it would be a concession fatal to all my views and theories" (122).

The reality of racial prejudice within the black community is seen when Mrs. Clayton exclaims, "That nigger . . . can never set foot in this house . . . But you've done just right; we never would have been able to hold up our heads again if we had introduced a black

man, even a Congressman, . . . as the sweetheart of Alice" (123).

Both Mr. and Mrs. Clayton are confronted by events that require moral choices. Their decision to shun Hamilton Brown reinforces the concept that racial inferiority and racial prejudice exists in the North as well as in the South. Chesnutt develops the Claytons as types to present his concern for racial prejudice that exists within the black community. Chesnutt's protest is that citizens such as the Claytons base fundamental values on the criteria of color.

Consequently Chesnutt's final concept in this story is similar to his first concept. He editorializes, "What the white people of the United States need most, in dealing with this problem, is a higher conception of the brotherhood of man. For of one blood God made all the nations of the earth" (131). Therefore, he pleads for acceptance for all races. This plea is evident in much of Chesnutt's fiction as my analysis of his novels will indicate.

This story illustrates well Render's point that Chesnutt "demonstrates that the Afro-Americans respond in like manner to the stimuli which, under similar conditions, motivate all other human beings. Thus by letting his Negro characters display basic human motivating forces such as love, . . . pride, ambition, integrity, and fear in life-like situations, Chesnutt

emphasizes their innate humanity" (Charles Chesnutt 83).

The pride concerning their "whiteness" and social ambitions demonstrated through the actions of Mr. and Mrs. Clayton are excellent examples of how Chesnutt criticizes the prejudice of persons of mixed-race toward Negroes with darker skin, and thus he does emphasize their innate humanity.

In "Cicely's Dream" Chesnutt views positively the work accomplished by the Republican carpetbag government in North Carolina. His praise for Yankee schoolteachers in this story seems to be a direct contrast to Dixon's belief that schoolteachers from the North should be shipped back to Boston in glass cages like rattlesnakes (The Leopard's Spots 47).

Chesnutt, however, pleads for a more balanced perspective. Concerning Reconstruction officials and Northern teachers, he writes, "It may even, in time, be conceded that some good came out of the carpet-bag governments, as, for instance, the establishment of a system of popular education in the former slave states" (150).

In this story Chesnutt also pays tribute to "a brigade of Yankee schoolmasters and schoolma'ams" who invade Dixie. An example is Martha Chandler, who opens a Freedman's Bureau School in Patesville. She too makes a moral choice: To risk ostracism and condemnation by

Southern politicians and educational leaders or to remain in a comfortable social and economic position in the North. Her decision to teach former slaves is indicative of her desire to obey the law of moral obligation. She was "one . . . whose hands went out toward an oppressed race, . . . in the sublime and not unfruitful effort to transform three millions of slaves into intelligent freemen" (151).

I see this tribute by Chesnutt as a strong contrast to the anti-Northern sentiment promoted by Page and Dixon. Chesnutt's perspective is that education can ultimately give the Southern black the opportunity for economic and cultural advancement.

In "The Bouquet" Chesnutt exposes the racial bias and prejudice toward blacks that continues to exist in some of the older Southern families in the 1890s. Mrs. Myrover, whose husband, Colonel Myrover, had fought bravely for the Confederate Army at Vicksburg, is an example of such prejudice.

When her daughter Mary prepares to teach at a colored school, Mrs. Myrover states, "I don't like it, Mary . . . It's a long step from owning such people to teaching them. What do they need with education? It will only make them unfit for work" (272). Her racial prejudice is a barrier in acknowledging the right of blacks to receive an education. This sentiment--disdain

for educational opportunities for blacks--was also expressed by Harris' Uncle Remus.

When Uncle Remus, as a spokesman for Southern white aristocrats, affirms that education for the black will be the ruination of the country, he realizes that when a black receives an education, the plantation owner will lose a plow-hand. The labor supply for menial labor will be eroded. Mrs. Myrover similarly affirms that educational opportunities for blacks will erode the labor supply in the South.

A close bond of friendship develops between Mary and one of her students, Sophy Tucker. However, Chesnutt notes that the racial barriers established by Southern whites prevent the full freedom to express that friendship. For example, a white teacher is not to be seen in public with members of his or her own class. If students meet their teacher on the street, they do not expect their teacher to speak to them "unless she happened to be alone and no other white person was in sight" (278). Furthermore, when Sophy carried books up to the front doorstep of Mary's house, Mrs. Myrover states, "Mary, I wish you wouldn't let those little darkeys follow you to the house. I don't want them in the yard" (279).

When Mary dies, her mother gives strict orders that no colored people be admitted to the house to pay their respects. She states, "They had my daughter when she

was alive, . . . and they've killed her. I don't want one of them at the funeral or anywhere around" (182).

In this story Chesnutt develops the types of Mrs. Myrover and Mary to present opposite perspectives in dealing with post-Civil War educational trends.

Chesnutt skillfully gives a contrast in attitudes in this story between white Southerners after the Civil War: Mrs. Myrover who "could not reconcile herself to the changed order of things following the return of peace" (281) and Mary who, even though she too is a member of the aristocracy of the old regime, makes a moral choice to be involved as a Southerner in educating blacks. She also, as Chesnutt states, "might be said to represent the new order of things, in which labor was in time to become honorable" (270). Thus Chesnutt portrays hope for the South in the younger generation of Southerners who can accept responsibility for teaching blacks.

"The Web of Circumstance" portrays the inability of a black to receive a fair trial in a Southern court of justice during the Reconstruction era. Ben Davis, a black blacksmith, is known by the white and colored community for his thrift, his initiative, and his desire to take advantage of opportunities now available to blacks after the Civil War.

Ben states to several white men, "We colored folks never had no chance ter git nothin' befo' de wah, like I

has, an' bought as much lan' as I has, de niggers might 'a' got half de lan' by dis time" (293).

Ben admires a whip owned by Colonel Thornton. Thus, when the whip is missing from the Colonel's barn and later found in Ben's shop, he is arrested.

The politically-ambitious State's attorney claims in court that Ben is "a Negro nihilist, a communist, a secret devotee of Tom Paine and Voltaire, a pupil of the anarchist propaganda, which, if not checked by the stern hand of the law, will fasten its insidious fangs on our social system, and drag it down to ruin" (298).

Each official of the white power structure--the attorneys, each jury member, the sheriff, the judge--faces a moral choice in this account: To look objectively at the situation or to allow the popular concept that all blacks are thieves to dominate their thinking.

No witnesses testify that Ben took the whip, but Ben's prejudiced defense attorney delivers what sounded more "like an appeal for mercy than a demand for justice." The judge and State's attorney speak of circumstantial evidence. Consequently, the all-white male jury finds Ben guilty of larceny.

Although Colonel Thornton asked the judge to be lenient in the sentence, Ben is sentenced to five years in the penitentiary at hard labor; this is a striking

contrast to the lighter sentence of one year given to a white male who is convicted of manslaughter.

Chesnutt implies that Ben is given a harsh sentence because he advocates black ownership of property. He can not receive a fair trial because he is a black. Reflecting Southern aristocratic attitudes, the judge is fearful that Ben's opinions would "breed discontent, and give rise to strained relations between them and their best friends, their old masters, who understand their real nature and their real needs, . . ." (311-312). Thus he punishes Ben as a warning to blacks that they should not be too progressive in their ideas as to their proper place in society.

Ben Davis has all of the qualities needed for advancement as a black: a skilled trade, property, and an unblemished reputation for honesty. But now he is a victim of an all-white criminal justice system.

When Ben returns back to his village after his five-year imprisonment, he discovers that his wife is living with Tom, his helper at the blacksmith shop, that his daughter drowned, and that a mob lynched his son for shooting a white man. Chesnutt implies that Tom had taken the whip and "planted" it in Ben's shop.

Chesnutt skillfully portrays the emotional changes that developed in Ben as a result of these events in his life: ". . . hope took flight . . . Despair followed,

and black hatred of all mankind . . . A burning desire for revenge sprang up in him" (317-318).

On the plantation Thornton kills Ben when he sees him, armed with a club, near his young daughter.

This tragic story ends with Chesnutt's idealistic plea, "Let not the shining thread of hope become so enmeshed in the web of circumstances that we lose sight of it. . ." (323).

Chesnutt skillfully incorporates in this account several stereotypes found in Southern fiction: Ben Davis who symbolizes a progressive young black, Colonel Thornton as an aristocratic Southern plantation owner, and the State's attorney as a racially biased Southerner who works on the emotions of the jury.

After William Dean Howells read the short stories collected in The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line, he wrote in his article, "Mr. Charles W. Chesnutt's Stories," that these "stories are Mr. Chesnutt's most important work, whether we consider them merely as realistic fiction, apart from their author, or as studies of that middle world of which he is naturally and voluntarily a citizen" (700).

Chesnutt's goal is to portray the strengths and weaknesses of human personalities in his fiction--a cultured but courageous Mr. Ryder, a loving and caring Sophy, a highly prejudiced Mr. Clayton, a bitter Tom, a self-sacrificing mammy--as they seek to deal with

sometimes subtle and not so subtle prejudice as well as with psychological problems that result from racial conflict and political, economic, and social change in the South. In dealing with the psychological conflicts of mixed-race, white relationships, Chesnutt exposes the realities of the color line through these stories. His social perspective in each story portrays some aspect of the black, mixed-race position in the North and in the South.

Chesnutt now directs his literary efforts toward his role as a social advocate for legal and social rights for blacks in the South.

Three major issues discussed in The House Behind the Cedars are the issues of intermarriage between races, "passing", and white supremacy. When Chesnutt submitted The House Behind the Cedars to the publisher, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, he wrote in a letter dated September 27, 1900:

I hope the book may raise some commotion, I hardly care in what quarter, though whether, from the nature of the theme it will, I don't know . . . the issue of "miscegenation" was brought up at the recent conference of leading white men of the South to discuss the race problem; and one of the solutions put forth involved the future amalgamation with the white race of at least a remnant of the black

population . . . I choose it because I understand it, but I hope to make it interesting to others because of the element of human interest involved (H. M. Chesnutt (152)).

In the struggle for white domination and control of the South in the Reconstruction era, whites solemnly resolved to keep the races separate in marriage relationships. John H. Franklin writes, "Beginning in Tennessee in 1870, white Southerners enacted laws against intermarriage of the races in every Southern state" (266). For example, Mississippi declared such marriages "incestuous and void". An intermarriage ban was written into the state constitution of South Carolina in 1895 (Bennett 65). Thus the question of intermarriage between races was of great interest to Chesnutt who lived in the South as well as in the North.

In his 1889 address, "An Inside View of the Negro Question," Chesnutt observed that "the much-dreaded 'miscegenation.' so freely condoned by a former generation of white people, . . . and so loudly condemned by the present generation, when there is a possibility that it may some day receive the sanction of law, never was and never will be possible without the consent of the white people."

In his Medina, Ohio, speech in 1913, Chesnutt reiterated his belief that individuals should be free to

marry whomever they choose as a right of contract. He condemned as legally wrong, morally pernicious, and personally insulting any laws forbidding intermarriage as were then in effect in all the southern and a few northern states.

Andrews notes that "not until The House Behind the Cedars would a novelist dealing with passing and miscegenation take up the particularly sensitive issue of a 'black' man's passing into the white world via intermarriage with a white woman" (The Literary Career 153). John Walden then is perhaps the first character in American fiction "who, having been raised 'black,' decides on his own to pass for white and constructs a legal and moral justification for doing so" (The Literary Career 164). He serves as Chesnutt's moral voice on the sensitive issue of passing.

When John meets his mother and Rena, his sister, he "represented to them the world from which circumstances had shut them out" (19-20). He relates to them the events that have occurred in his life since he left home approximately ten years ago and "passed" into, as Chesnutt states, "a seemingly hostile world" (21), "an escape from captivity" (21). He tells them that he married the daughter of a well-established Southern family. When his wife dies, he asks his mother if Rena could come with him to care for the child.

John realizes that Rena's future as a person of mixed-race in Patesville is limited, and he argues for her leaving, " She will have no chance here, where our story is known. The war has wrought great changes, has put the bottom rail on top, and all that--but it hasn't wiped that out. Nothing but death can remove that stain, if it does not follow us even beyond the grave . . . (26).

The "stain" that John refers to is the fact that John and Rena are the children of a quadroon mother, Molly Walden, who was the mistress of a now-deceased white gentleman. This family history hinders them from social and economic equality in Patesville. As Chesnutt states, "They were under the shadow of some cloud which clearly shut them out from the better society of the town" (31).

In the summer of 1891 Chesnutt told the editors at Houghton Mifflin that he wanted to give the people of mixed blood "their day in court," because they had been subjected to so many biased attitudes (H. M. Chesnutt 69). Furthermore, in a letter dated June 5, 1890, he had written to George Washington Cable that many intelligent people saw persons of mixed-race as "unnatural." One person, he added, had called the person of mixed blood "an insult to nature" and "a kind of monster" (H. M. Chesnutt 58). Thus Chesnutt wanted to correct this view through his art by treating a person

of mixed-race as an ordinary human being, and not as a moral aberration.

John's plea that Rena be allowed to pass into white society as "an escape from captivity" parallels events in the life of one of Chesnutt's relatives, and Chesnutt, being nearly white, had considered "passing" at age 17. He wrote in his Journal on July 31, 1875, ". . . I believe I'll leave here and pass anyhow, for I am as white as any of them" (H. M. Chesnutt 13). However in October 1878 he felt he could live down prejudice and exalt his race (H. M. Chesnutt 17) and live as a voluntary Negro. He adds, "I will live down the prejudice; I will crush it out. I will show the world that a man may spring from a race of slaves" (H. M. Chesnutt 17).

Molly now realizes that "she must lose her daughter as well as her son, and this should be her penance for her sin. That her children must expiate as well the sins of their fathers" (31).

John's request that Rena come along with him to South Carolina is based on the fact that the legislature there had decided that octoroons like John and Rena are officially white.

John's visit with Judge Straight to share with him the events of his life since he left Patesville and moved to Clarence [Charleston], South Carolina, is Chesnutt's method of commenting on social customs in the

South. The Judge reflects upon the social customs in Patesville and muses, "Right and wrong must be eternal verities, but our standards for measuring them vary with our latitude and our epoch. We make our customs lightly; once made, like our sins, they grip us in bands of steel; we become the creatures of our creations" (35).

An example of customs that "grip us in bonds of steel" is portrayed when John as a teen tells Judge Straight that he wishes to become a lawyer. The Judge said to him, "You are aware, of course, that you are a negro?" John's reply is "I am white, and I am free." But the Judge replies, "You are black, my lad, and you are not free . . . the laws do not permit men of color to practice law, and public sentiment would not allow one of them to study it" (169-170).

As Rena accompanies John to South Carolina, she too makes a conscious moral decision to pass "over on the other side" and assumes, as John did, the name of Warwick.

At a ball she is crowned the "Queen of Love and Beauty" (55). George Tryon vows to make her "queen of his home and mistress of his life" (70). When he proposes to Rena, her mind is in turmoil; "Would he have loved me at all if he had known the story of my past? Or, having loved me, could he blame me now for what I

cannot help? (74) . . . Would he love me, if he knew?" (76).

The next day she shares her fears with John: "I am afraid to marry him, without telling him. If he should find out afterwards, he might cast me off, or cease to love me. If he did not know it, I should be forever thinking of what he would do if he should find out . . ." (77-78). Rena now faces a major moral decision: To tell George about her racial background or to remain silent. This moral choice is similar to the moral choices faced by persons of mixed-race in Chesnutt's The Wife of His Youth

John's position is that they are under no moral obligation to make public their family history. He feels that they have certain rights by virtue of the laws of nature. He is defiant concerning the social values of the community. Chesnutt stresses the concept that "the taint of black blood was the unpardonable sin, from the unmerited penalty of which there was no escape except by concealment" (127-128).

Rena later returns to Patesville to visit her ailing mother. Tryon also travels to Patesville to conduct some legal matters with Judge Straight. Tryon sees Rena in the drugstore and now realizes the truth concerning her racial identity. He realizes that Rowena Warwick is really Rena Walden, a person of mixed-race, from Patesville. Chesnutt describes Tryon's face as "a

face as pale as death, with starting eyes, in which love, which once had reigned there, had now given place to astonishment and horror" (140). Tryon also must make a moral choice: to marry one whom he loves and thus face social ostracism by his friends or to conform to the in-grained beliefs of the community concerning intermarriage between races. Andrews' belief that The House Behind the Cedars tests "whether the marriage institution in the postwar South could be thus freed from inherited prejudices" (The Literary Career 162-163) is relevant here. Can Tryon overcome his "inherited" prejudices? Will he remain trapped by them? These issues need to be resolved by Tryon.

Tryon's first response is that "he could see nothing but the fraud of which he had been made the victim. A negro girl had been foisted upon him for a white woman, and he had almost committed the unpardonable sin against his race in marrying her" (143).

He adds, "If Rena had been white, pure white, (for in his creed there was no compromise), he would have braved any danger for her sake" (196).

In this way Chesnutt contrasts the unconditional love of John Winthrop for Clara, a person of mixed-race, in "Her Virginia Mammy" with George Tryon's conditional love for Rena; he rejects Rena when he realizes that her beauty is "tainted".

When John hears of the breakdown in relationships between Tryon and Rena, he asks Rena to return to Clarence with him, but she emotionally replies, "The law, you said, made us white; but not the law, nor even love, can conquer prejudice. He spoke of my beauty, my grace . . . I looked into his eyes and believed him. And yet he left me without a word! . . . with a look that told me how he hated and despised me" (178-179) . . . He looked at me as though I were not even a human being" (180).

In this dialogue Chesnutt graphically portrays the anguish of an octoroon. She is a victim of racial prejudice. Rena, in her anguish, resolves never to marry any man. Nor will she attempt to "pass" again: "God is against it; I'll stay with my own people" (181).

Rena's broken relationship with Tryon changes her perspective toward blacks whose skin is darker than hers. Earlier she had despised them because "they were not so white as she was, and had been slaves while she was free . . ." (193). Now she desires to help them. She agrees to teach at a school for black children under the leadership of Mr. Jeff Wain, a person of mixed-race. This new perspective of racial tolerance is a direct contrast to the perspectives of the Claytons.

Tryon's prejudices toward blacks as an inferior race conforms to social beliefs held by the white community. Concerning Rena now, he had "seen her with

the mask thrown off . . . Her few months of boarding school . . . had evidently been a mere veneer over the underlying negro . . . With the monkey-like imitateness of the negro she had copied the manners of white people . . . and had dropped them . . . when they ceased to serve a purpose" (223).

Later, however, Tryon realizes that he is a victim of his own sense of racial superiority. He is keenly aware that "custom was tyranny" (292). He realizes that he does love Rena, and he now resolves to return to Patesville to marry her.

However, when he arrives in Patesville, he receives the tragic news that Rena is dead. His actions, beliefs, and deep love for Rena indicate his revolt against the written laws concerning racial intermarriage in a white-dominated culture. For example, Southern states such as Tennessee and Mississippi had passed laws against intermarriage of the races. Tryon's moral courage and his intended actions give a glimmer of hope by Chesnutt that a new generation of Southerners will be able to overcome racial prejudice.

Rena's death is a result of several factors. Her flight through the woods to avoid the sexual attack by Jeff Wain and her resulting physical exhaustion is one factor. However, I do not believe that it is the main cause of her death. The primary cause is the psychological and emotional stress resulting from

Tryon's rejection of her due to race. She loses her willpower to live. Render correctly observes that Rena's death is the "final reaction of a woman of her background, temperament, and experience to the harsh socioeconomic realities of her age" (Charles Chesnutt 124).

Having focused on the two issues--passing into white society and racial intermarriage--I will now present a third issue, white supremacy, as seen in The House Behind the Cedars. This issue governs and influences the practices of "passing" and racial intermarriage in Southern society.

Dr. Green, a physician in Patesville, is a key spokesman for the doctrine of white supremacy and for the need of whites to regain political control in the Reconstruction era. In conversation with Tryon, he exclaims concerning current conditions after the Civil War, "In time we shall regain control. The negro is an inferior creature; God has marked him with the badge of servitude, and has adjusted his intellect to a servile condition. We will not long submit to his domination . . ." (136).

Furthermore, when Tryon came to Patesville, he read an article that maintained that

owing to a special tendency of the negro blood, however diluted, to revert to the African type, any future amalgamation of the

white and black races, which foolish and wicked Northern negrophiles predicted as the ultimate result of the new conditions confronting the South would therefore be an ethnological impossibility; for the smallest trace of negro blood would inevitably drag down the superior race to the level of the inferior . . . (105)

Tryon concludes that this writer presented a "well-constructed argument" (105).

John Waldon also understands the impact of white supremacy in Patesville. He realizes that should the family secret ever be discovered, his fine social position "would collapse like a house of cards" (66).

Judge Straight also analyzed the power of white supremacy in Patesville and also its influence on Rena's future. He observed that "there was a possible future for her under the new order of things; but white people had not changed their opinion of negroes, except for the worse" (120).

The House Behind the Cedars, more than any other single work of Chesnutt's, reflects his knowledge of the distinct problems of people of mixed blood as they negotiated the South's color line after the Civil War.

In a letter dated December 27, 1889, and addressed to Walter Hines Page, Chesnutt states, "There is scarcely an incident in it [The House. . .] that has not

been paralleled in real life to my actual knowledge" (The Literary Career 138).

Gloster notes that in The House Behind the Cedars Chesnutt

attempts to establish the novel of Negro life on a sound esthetic foundation. In this work the passer is not censured, and the attachment between the colored heroine and her white lover is exhibited as decent and respectable. This method of handling such a relationship furnishes sharp contrast to that of Dixon's novels, which consistently depict interracial sexual contacts as sensual and demoralizing (39-40).

Gloster's argument is valid. For example, in The Clansman Gus, a "black brute," rapes Marion; he is executed by the Ku Klux Klan. In The Leopard's Spots Harris, a person of mixed-race, wishes to love Lowell's daughter. Lowell's response is that "you are a Negro, and I do not desire the infusion of your blood in my family . . . The idea is nauseating. . ." (395). Tim Selby, a black, is hanged and mutilated for desiring to kiss Miss Graham, a white teacher applicant for a black school.

Page and Dixon portray persons of mixed-race as the embodiment of the worst qualities of both races and therefore a menace to both. A woman of mixed-race is

portrayed as the debaser of the white aristocrat in The Clansman.

Furthermore, Dixon states in The Leopard's Spots that there is "no future if racial lines are broken . . . its proud citizenship sinks to the level of a mongrel breed of mulattoes" (200). He adds, "One drop of Negro blood makes a Negro . . . become mulatto, and that is death" (244). "If a mulatto, will the future be worth discussing?" (336).

Chesnutt, however, demonstrates that individuals of mixed blood such as John Waldon can succeed in reaching personal goals. He did become a successful lawyer in Clarence. He did hold the respect of the white community there. He did achieve a sense of identity when he became a Southern white.

Chesnutt therefore presents passing and racial intermarriage as deliberate acts: John's and Rena's choices to pass are deliberate ones. He presents passing as morally defensible. Through this novel he wishes to arouse the conscience of America to the great moral evil of race prejudice.

Furthermore, he focuses in this novel on one of his basic themes--the humanity of Negroes. He portrays John and Rena as human beings with real fears, doubts, concerns, and ambitions. He portrays their concern to achieve identity in the post-Reconstruction era.

The House Behind the Cedars then is very relevant to the era in which it was published. The issues of racial intermarriage and passing as presented by Chesnutt are vital social issues that faced the South in the 1890s and early 1900s. However, his attention in 1901 shifted to political and economic issues in the South as new federal and state laws established restrictions on political rights for blacks in the South. These issues, as portrayed in Chesnutt's fiction, will be analyzed in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR AN ANALYSIS OF THE FICTION OF
CHARLES W. CHESNUTT: HIS GROWING PESSIMISM

Blacks achieved social and political gains in human rights in the South during the Reconstruction era. For example, the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868 extended federal citizenship to blacks and made illegal many aspects of the Black Codes. Furthermore, when Congress passed the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870, a wider exercise of the franchise was guaranteed along with the removal of race as a disability. Franklin observes, "In the South Reconstruction laid the foundations for more democratic living by sweeping away all qualifications for voting and holding office, and by establishing a system of universal free public education" (249-50).

But white power groups formed secret protective societies such as the Regulators, Jayhawkers, Black Horse Cavalry, Knights of the White Camelia, the White Brotherhood, the Constitutional Union Guards, and the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan to "keep the Negro in his place." Franklin writes, "White Southerners expected to do by extralegal or blatantly illegal means what had not been allowed by law: to exercise absolute control over the Negro, drive him and his fellows from power, and establish 'white supremacy'" (253).

State and federal legislators passed laws in 1870 and 1871 to suppress illegal activities of these outlaw organizations, but white supremacy groups used other

methods of intimidation: the destruction of blacks' crops, the arson of sharecroppers' barns and houses, and the beating and lynching of blacks who voted Republican. White Southerners realized that violence was still the surest means to keep blacks politically impotent. Franklin observes that "in countless communities they [blacks] were not allowed, under penalties of severe reprisals, to show their faces in town on election day" (258).

Even the United States Supreme Court ruled against political rights for blacks. In United States vs. Cruikshank the Court declared that the Fifteenth Amendment guaranteed citizens not the right to vote but only the right not to be discriminated against by the states on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. Apparently the Court was pressured by public sentiment which felt that the South was free to settle its problems as best it could. Encouraged by the court decision, Southern state legislatures instituted "poll tax requirements, elaborate and confusing election schemes, complicated balloting processes, and highly centralized election codes . . . by which Negroes were disfranchised," states Franklin (259).

In Mississippi legislators drafted a suffrage amendment in 1890; South Carolina disfranchised blacks in 1895; lawmakers inserted the "grandfather clause"

into the state constitution of Louisiana in 1898. It called for "an addition to the permanent registration list of the names of all male persons whose fathers and grandfathers were qualified to vote on January 1, 1867. At that time, of course, no Negroes were qualified to vote in Louisiana" (Franklin 264-65). Furthermore, the legislatures in Georgia, Florida (1889), North Carolina (1900), Tennessee (1890), Arkansas (1893), Mississippi (1890), and Texas initiated the poll tax as a prerequisite for voting.

In 1898 a race riot broke out on election day in Wilmington, North Carolina. During the riot mobs drove the editor of the Record, a black newspaper, out of town, destroyed his office, and damaged blacks' property. Six hundred armed whites shot up the black district and killed approximately one hundred blacks.

Concerning the increased tension between racial groups in the South, Wintz writes:

The 'industrial education' and accommodation championed by Booker T. Washington was losing its appeal for many Negro intellectuals as a result of the deteriorating position of blacks in the South. During the years around the turn of the century there was a dramatic increase in the amount of racial violence, both in the number of lynchings and in the number of brutal attacks on Negroes, such as

occurred in Wilmington in 1898. In addition to this, there was an increase in the popularity of pseudo-scientific racist beliefs which provided an ideological basis for both American imperialism and the oppression of blacks (130).

The activity of the secret societies, the passage of suffrage amendments, and the Supreme Court ruling concerning the Fifteenth Amendment led Chestnutt to note that "the condition of the negro in the South was becoming intolerable" in the post-Reconstruction era (H. M. Chestnutt 158).

He thought that if he could write a new novel based on the Wilmington riot, "he might stir up the thinking people of the country to a realization of what was taking place in the South" (H. M. Chestnutt 159). His novels then are a response to the progressively worsening racial situation in the South.

Consequently, he toured the Southern states in February 1901 and presented lectures in colleges for blacks and at his old school in Fayetteville. In Wilmington he collected material for his new novel. Helen Chesnutt notes that the people there were eager to give him details of the riot because they too believed that his new book would do much for the black population in the South (159).

The dominant note of The Marrow of Tradition is deep-seated tradition which shapes the racial perspective of white supremacy advocates in North Carolina and in the South as a whole. The present situation that Chesnutt observes is rooted deeply in past practices and beliefs concerning the black race. An entire society adheres to a set of traditions: traditions that keep the whites in control; traditions that keep blacks confined to the lowest level on the social scale. The old order, slavery, is over, but tradition hinders the acceptance of the new social order.

Chesnutt's hope is that The Marrow of Tradition, as a sociological novel, would shed light on the complex moral and sociological problems present in the South. This novel is evidence of his "high, holy purpose" : to educate whites and to appeal to the "public conscience" of the South in particular and to the whole country as well. Two major problems portrayed in this novel are the doctrine of white supremacy and the disfranchisement of the Negro.

The geographical setting for this novel of purpose is Wellington [Wilmington], North Carolina, located eighty-five miles down the Cape Fear River from Fayetteville, Chesnutt's home town.

In The Marrow of Tradition Major Carteret, as editor of the Wellington Morning Chronicle, serves as

the spokesman for the white population. He is troubled by the results of the last state election when the "Fusion" ticket, a combination of Republicans and Populists, won many of the state offices. Voters placed several blacks in office as a result of this election.

As a staunch advocate for white supremacy, Carteret drafts an editorial concerning the election results. His theme is that the black is unfit to participate in government due to his limited education, his lack of experience, his criminal tendencies, and his "hopeless mental and physical inferiority to the white race" (The Marrow of Tradition 31). His position negates any possibility for equality. Furthermore, he argues that "the white and black races could never attain social and political harmony by commingling their blood" (31). He believes that "no two unassimilable races could ever live together except in the relation of superior and inferior" (31).

The issue of racial superiority in Carteret's thinking is put to a practical test in his own household. When his son faces possible surgery, Carteret does not permit Dr. William Miller, a person of mixed-race by racial definition and a noted surgeon by profession, to enter his house to assist Dr. Burns. Carteret has "certain principles,--call them prejudices, if you like,--certain inflexible rules of

conduct by which he regulates his life. One of these . . . forbids the recognition of the Negro as a social equal" (71).

Two additional proponents of white supremacy join Major Carteret in the effort to limit the social and political rights of blacks: General Belmont and Captain McBane. Belmont, a lawyer by profession and a former owner of slaves, is actively involved in state and local politics. Belmont believes in the "divine right of white men and gentlemen . . . he permitted no fine scruples to stand in the way of success" (34). Captain McBane had held a contract with the State for its convict labor, but he lost that contract when the Fusion government abolished the system of convict labor. McBane sees blacks as a "scrub race, an affliction to the country" (87). Thus both men have personal and economic reasons to limit the power of blacks.

Their belief in white supremacy prompts this trio--Carteret, Belmont, and McBane--to set as their goals the repeal of the Fifteenth Amendment on the national level. Their goal on the state level is "to confine the negro to that inferior condition for which nature had evidently designed for him" through changes in the state constitution (79). Franchise for blacks must be terminated for the welfare of the state.

Chesnutt develops stereotyped characters such as Major Carteret, General Belmont, and George McBane to

reflect traditional concepts of white supremacy and superiority. Their beliefs and actions provide support for Chesnutt's theme of man's inhumanity to man. The practices of George McBane demonstrate Chesnutt's belief that practices of racial inequality and racial injustice are still much in evidence in the South.

Chesnutt notes, however, that historically the people of North Carolina were content with the status quo: "The anti-Negro legislation in more southern states, with large negro majorities, had awakened scarcely an echo in this state" (80). Due to this situation Carteret vows to arouse the white citizenry to action.

An opposing spokesman in Wellington is Barber, the editor of the Record, a black newspaper. In his editorial he maintains that the lynching of blacks occurred, not for crimes committed, but

for voluntary acts which might naturally be expected to follow from the miscegenation laws by which it was sought, in all the Southern states, to destroy liberty of contract, and, for the purpose of maintaining a fanciful purity of race, to make crimes of marriages to which neither nature nor religion nor the laws of other states interposed an insurmountable barrier (85).

This editorial, then, is an indictment of the laws and social system of the South as they relate to racial inter-marriage. Carteret later uses this editorial to inflame the emotions of the white population of Wellington.

The doctrine of white supremacy also influences the entire legal system in Wellington. When Mrs. Ochiltree is murdered in her bedroom, whites immediately direct suspicion toward the black community. Chesnutt states, "The mere suggestion that the crime had been committed by a negro was equivalent to proof against any negro that might be suspected and could not prove his innocence" (179).

For example, when Sandy Campbell, a loyal servant of Mr. Delamere, is arrested for the murder, McBane calls for immediate action, "Burn the nigger; we seem to have the right nigger but whether we have or not, burn a nigger. It is an assault upon the white race, . . . committed by the black race. . . . we shall hold the whole race responsible for the misdeeds of each individual" (182). Chesnutt directly criticizes this Southern method of justice that immediately pins the guilt on any available black.

Carteret illogically sees the murder of Mrs. Ochiltree as "the logical and inevitable result of the conditions which have prevailed in this town for the past year" (182). He immediately prints an extra

edition of the Morning Chronicle to state that "drastic efforts were necessary to protect the white women of the South against brutal, lascivious, and murderous assaults at the hands of negro men" (185).

When Watson, a black attorney, pleads with Judge Everton for his help to halt plans to lynch Sandy, the Judge states that, although lynching was, "as a rule unjustifiable, . . . there were exceptions to all rules . . . the sovereign people might assert itself and take the law into its own hands. . . ." (193). He adds that the burden of proof for Sandy's innocence rests on the black community: "If he is innocent, then produce the real criminal" (193). Sandy is freed only after Mr. Delamere tells Carteret that he has the evidence to prove that his grandson, Tom Delamere, is the murderer. Tom Delamere, a gambler, a cheat at cards, and a murderer, typifies an erosion of the Southern aristocratic family. Tom is a direct contrast to Mr. Delamere who is morally upright, honest, and typifies the highest form of Southern aristocratic idealism in plantation tradition fiction.

The doctrine of white supremacy advocated in the editorial column of the Morning Chronicle resulted in new efforts to discourage blacks in Wellington from voting on election day in 1898. Watson informs Dr. Miller that armed white men "disarmed the colored people, killing half a dozen in the process, . . . They

have formed a provisional city government . . . and have ordered me and half a dozen other fellows to leave town in forty-eight hours . . ." (279).

Carteret realizes that efforts to "keep the Negroes in their places" has led to rioting, bloodshed, and arson. He states with regret to Ellis, "They are burning houses and killing women and children. . . . I did not intend wholesale murder and arson" (304-05). Although he desired power and control in Wellington, he is powerless to check the excesses. The mob is in control. Chesnutt states, "Their [the mob's] present course was but the logical outcome of the crusade which the Morning Chronicle had preached . . . for many months" (306).

During the day's events a stray bullet kills Dr. Miller's son, the mob burns Dr. Miller's hospital, and Josh Green's group of armed blacks dies in a battle with armed whites.

Chesnutt's portrayal of Wellington as a "seething caldron of unrestrained passions" (289) leads him, I believe, to dramatize four possible avenues of actions to be taken by blacks in Wellington in particular and by blacks in the South generally.

The first course of action is exemplified by Jerry Letlow's assuming the attitude of humility and subservience as a black in his relationships with whites in the community. He accepts his role as a servant.

General Belmont states, "Jerry now is a very good negro. He's not one of your new negroes, who think themselves as good as white men, and want to run the government. Jerry knows his place,--he is respectful, humble, obedient and content . . . " (87-88).

When Jerry listens to Carteret, Belmont, and McBane plan their political strategy, he says, "I'm gwine ter keep my mouf shet and stan' in wid de Angry-Saxon race,--ez dey calls deyse'ves nowadays, an' keep on de right side er my bread an' meat" (90). He agrees to stay away from the polls on election day.

During the riot on election day, Jerry desperately tries to find Carteret. However, Green's men carry him along into the hospital, and later he is shot by the mob. The role of subservience fails as an option for blacks. Carteret, McBane, and Belmont would not sacrifice to provide for Jerry's safety. Jerry could not rely on the protection of white society. His position involves rejection of his blackness, a betrayal of his race, and a surrendering of his rights as a citizen.

A second course of action that Chesnutt presents for blacks is that they should leave Wellington and establish a home elsewhere. For example, Attorney Watson agrees to leave within forty-eight hours. White supremacy groups have intimidated him. He senses isolation and abandonment by the community. He

bitterly states, " Yesterday I had a hundred white friends in town, or thought I had,--men who . . . sometimes gave me their hands to shake . . . When the race cry is started . . . friendship, religion, humanity, reason, all shrivel up like dry leaves in a raging furnace" (280). Through Watson, Chesnutt registers his criticism of the fragile relationships existing between the two races.

Chesnutt's stance here is that escape to the North is only a temporary solution. Escape does not contribute toward a permanent solution to racial conflict in the Southern states.

A third course of action for the blacks is militant violence. For example, Josh Green and his small group of blacks wish to strike back at the white supremacy forces in Wellington.

Green's militant stance is a direct contrast to the servile manner of the black servant such as Jerry Letlow and as portrayed in the "plantation tradition" fiction of this era. Green directs his revenge toward McBane, who, as a leader of a Ku Klux terrorist group, killed Green's father when Green was approximately ten years old. He states, "I hid in de bushes an' seen de whole thing, an' it wuz branded on my mem'ry, suh, like a red-hot iron bran's de skin" (111).

When Dr. Miller earlier had counseled him to forgive his enemies, Green replied, "Yas, suh, I've

I'arnt all dat in Sunday-school, an' I've heard de preachers say it time an' time ag'in. But it 'pears to me dat dis fergitfulniss and fergiviss is mighty one-sided. De w'ite folks don' fer give nothin' de niggers does. . . . But I ain' fergot" (113).

Chesnutt's point is that militancy by Wellington's blacks is no solution to ease the racial strife that exists in the town. Violence will only lead to more violence. For example, when one of Green's men kills a white man, the mob cries out for vengeance. Carteret cannot control the mob. The mob burns Miller's hospital, kills Green's men, and kills Green as he stabs McBane in the heart.

The fourth course of action for blacks to follow in Wellington is that of accommodation. Booker T. Washington advocated this course of action in the South, and I believe that the policy of accommodation is endorsed by Chesnutt. This policy is implemented by Dr. Miller.

Dr. Miller practices accommodation on the train from New York City to Wellington. Near Richmond, Virginia, the conductor asks him to move to the coach for blacks. The conductor explains, ". . . the law of Virginia does not permit colored passengers to ride in the white cars" (53- 54). When Dr. Burns protests this injustice, Miller states, "What he says is absolutely true, doctor, . . . It is the law, and we are powerless

to resist it. If we made any trouble, it would merely delay your journey and imperil a life. . . I'll go into the other car" (55). Thus he conforms to the laws of the state in order to assist Dr. Burns.

Furthermore, when Josh Green asks Dr. Miller to be the leader of his radical band, Miller pleads for them to adopt a position of accommodation:

Listen, men, . . . we would only be throwing our lives away. Suppose we . . . won a temporary victory. By morning every train . . . every road leading into Wellington, would be crowded with white men . . . with arms in their hands, curses on their lips, and vengeance in their hearts . . . They would kill us in the fight, or they would hang us afterwards . . . Our time will come,--the time when we can command respect for our rights; but it is not yet in sight (282-83).

The principle of accommodation is put to the test when Carteret requests Dr. Miller to come to his home to attend to his critically ill son after the riot. Miller, grief-stricken due to the accidental shooting of his only son by the mob, refuses to come. He states, ". . . there he lies dead . . . because you and a handful of your friends thought you must override the laws and run this town at any cost! . . . My duty calls

me here, by the side of my dead child and my suffering wife! I cannot go with you" (320).

However, when Mrs. Carteret pleads with him and then with his wife, who is Mrs. Carteret's half-sister, he agrees to go, but only after his wife, Janet, gives her permission. He bases his action upon the principle of accommodation. Even though Mrs. Carteret "had scorned and slighted and ignored the existence of his wife for all her life," (325) he now accompanies Mrs. Carteret to her residence.

Chesnutt's focus then is upon the Carterets, who represent the pride and prejudices of the New South aristocracy, and upon the Millers, who represent the New Black in the South. Through accommodation the two racial groups can avoid racial violence and bloodshed; through accommodation the two racial groups can perhaps learn to live together in a measure of harmony.

Miller, who had studied medicine in the North, as well as in Paris and Vienna, returned to the South to establish a medical practice. He spent part of his inheritance to build a hospital in Wellington. Chesnutt writes, "He had been strongly tempted to leave the South, and seek a home for his family and a career for himself in the freer North, where race antagonism was less keen. . . But his people had needed him, and he had wished to help them . . ." (51).

Chesnutt's development of Dr. Miller's character portrays his belief that persons of mixed-race can achieve success as doctors in the South and do make valuable contributions as role models for black youth.

This novel also portrays Chesnutt's long-range hope that the concept of white supremacy will diminish and that the bias toward intermarriage between races will lessen in the future.

For example, through the perspective of Dr. Miller, Chesnutt expresses his view that ultimately racial prejudice will die in the South, "He liked to believe that the race antagonism which hampered his progress and that of his people was a mere temporary thing, the outcome of former conditions, and bound to disappear in time . . ." (65). Chesnutt's hope is that well-educated blacks such as Dr. Miller and Attorney Watson can make valuable contributions in medical and legal circles. These contributions to the community could change the whites' perceptions toward blacks. However, this optimism does not seem very realistic in view of the Wellington riot.

Chesnutt also projects an element of hope in the scene where Carteret pleads with Dr. Miller to come to his home. Chesnutt states that "for a moment the veil of prejudice was rent in twain, and he [Carteret] saw things as they were, in their correct proportions and relations . . ." (321). Carteret had earlier realized

that his editorials were responsible for the murders and arsons in Wellington. The mob's cheers for him as "the champion of white supremacy" now make him ashamed of his leadership role in the town. This shift in attitude as an influential editor may result in a higher level of tolerance toward black citizens.

Chesnutt's optimism that racial prejudice will diminish in the South is seen in the reconciliation that occurs between Mrs. Olivia Carteret and Mrs. Janet Miller. Olivia is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Merkell. When Mrs. Merkell died, Merkell secretly married Julia Brown, his black maid, since marriage between white and coloured persons was forbidden by law. Janet is the daughter of Merkell and Julia. Janet, for twenty-five years, longs for Olivia's acceptance of her as her sister. She desires a kind word, a smile, or a nod that would give evidence that Olivia recognizes her as her sister. Janet realizes that Olivia had shunned her because she is a person of mixed-race. Now, 25 years later, Olivia recognizes and accepts Janet as her sister.

Olivia's acceptance of Janet as her sister is a major victory for racial acceptance. This decision is a moral choice by Olivia and focuses squarely on a moral and sociological problem given by Chesnutt in this novel. Olivia's acceptance of Janet as her sister is

one aspect of Chesnutt's literary campaign to revise the image of people of mixed blood.

Another element of hope concerning the lessening of racial tensions is seen in Carteret's invitation to Dr. Miller to ascend the stairs of the Carteret home to attend to the Carterets' ailing son. This is an important shift in attitude by Carteret as earlier he had refused Dr. Burns' request that Miller assist him in treating Carteret's son. Evans' statement, "There's time enough, but none to spare," (329) reflects Chesnutt's belief that the wounds of injustice and racial bitterness can heal just as Felix Carteret may be healed of his illness. Future generations in the New South may be able to transcend the element of color and accept each other as equals. But for the present time, no real unity or reconciliation is possible.

Another indication of hope that racial tensions are lessening is seen in the fact that Dr. Miller, the son of an ex-slave, could become a respected physician in the community and that a young black woman could become a nurse is also evidence that the New Black is making progress in the South.

However, Chesnutt also expresses his growing concern over the lack of racial reconciliation. He notes that "the weed [slavery] had been cut down, but its roots remained, deeply imbedded in the soil, to spring up and trouble a new generation" (269). The er

of slavery is over, but the era of Reconstruction government is also over. The revision of the Black Code laws to include black freedmen, the proliferation of Jim Crow laws, the renewed efforts to deny blacks the right to vote and hold office--these actions now trouble a new generation.

Chesnutt portrays his despair through several events in this novel: Dr. Miller's hospital to serve the black population is destroyed, mob rule is responsible for the deaths of numerous blacks, black leaders such as Attorney Watson are forced to leave Wellington, and the movement to disfranchise blacks triumphs. His despair is also evident through his portrayal of a judge and a sheriff who waver on the issue of a prisoner's rights. Thus Chesnutt's overall theme stresses man's inhumanity to man, despair over hope, regress over progress. Chesnutt presents no immediate solution to the racial conflicts present in Wellington.

In the early part of the 1900s, Chesnutt became increasingly concerned about economic conditions in the South that affected poor whites and blacks alike. Thus his next novel of purpose, The Colonel's Dream, focuses more on the economic issues than on political issues as evident in The Marrow of Tradition. Chesnutt's continuing concern for the welfare of the black population as well as his concern for the white laboring

class in the early 1900s is evident in The Colonel's Dream.

The setting for this novel is Clarendon [Fayetteville], North Carolina. It is Chesnutt's home town and also Colonel Henry French's, the white protagonist in this novel. He serves as the moral voice to communicate Chesnutt's vision for social, economic, and political reform in the South. French is a national hero stereotype; he has wealth, charm, high ideals, and leisure.

Having served in the Confederate Army during the Civil War, French moved to the North and successfully operated French and Company, Limited. When he sold the company, he decided to move back to Clarendon.

He finds the community has changed significantly: "It was all so like, and yet so different--shrunk somewhat, and faded, . . . The old town, whose ripeness was almost decay, whose quietness was scarcely distinguishable from lethargy, . . . the shingled roof [of the academy] was badly dilapidated . . ." (15-16).

Chesnutt later describes Clarendon's economic decline: "There were no mills or mines in the neighborhood, except for a few grist mills, and a sawmill . . . The lands of the large farmers were mostly mortgaged, either to Fetter's, or to the banks, of which he was the chief stockholder . . ." (77- 78).

French's initial visit with a former classmate, John McLean, soon leads to a discussion concerning white supremacy and the franchise for the black. McLean believes that if the new franchise amendment went through, blacks would be eliminated from politics. This would free white Southerners of the fear of "nigger domination," and progress would occur in the South.

Henry Clay Appleton, editor of the Clarendon Anglo-Saxon and a local representative in the legislature, believes that Clarendon needed to be rid of the fear of black domination and affirms that suffrage for blacks is an expensive joke for all concerned.

Dr. Mackenzie, pastor of the Presbyterian church, also supports the doctrine of white supremacy. When French shares with Mackenzie his plans to improve the academy for blacks and to build a public library open to "rich and poor, black and white" (162), Mackenzie exclaims, "I feel your time and money will be wasted. The Negroes are hopelessly degraded. They have degenerated rapidly since the war" (163). Furthermore, he believes that the Negro must be exterminated. Mackenzie affirms, "Like other weak races, they will vanish from the pathway of the strong" (164).

The candidate for governor gives his position concerning the franchise for Negroes: "So long as one Negro votes in the State, so long are we face to face with the nightmare of Negro domination . . . Equality at

the polls means social equality; social equality means intermarriage and corruption of blood, and degeneration and decay" (193-194). The candidate's position is a direct contrast to Chesnutt's plea that the franchise be returned to the black populace.

A social and moral issue alluded to in The Marrow of Tradition and explored more fully by Chesnutt in The Colonel's Dream is the convict lease system. For example, if a man is arrested for vagrancy, it is the duty of the sheriff to hire out the prisoner to any person who will, for the shortest period of service, pay the fine and court costs. This practice provided a plentiful supply of cheap labor in most Southern states.

In The Colonel's Dream Peter French, an elderly black servant of the Colonel, is arrested for vagrancy. He is fined \$25.00; the Colonel paid the fine and court costs and gave his former servant employment at his living quarters. Sam Brown is also "sold" to Fetter for eighteen months' labor to settle his fine of \$75.00 plus court costs.

When Colonel French protests this practice, the editor of the Anglo-Saxon gives this defense:

I suppose it might seem harsh, in comparison with your milder penal systems up North. But you must consider the circumstances, and make allowances for us. We have so many idle ignorant Negroes that something must be done

to make them work, or else they'll steal, and to keep them in their place, or they would run over us . . . These convict labor contracts are a source of considerable revenue to the State; they make up, in fact, for most of the outlay for Negro education (75-76).

As a social crusader French now examines criminal and debtor laws operative in North Carolina. He hires Attorney Albert Caxton to investigate the criminal laws. He finds that "men could be tried without jury and condemned to infamous punishments . . . for misdemeanours which in more enlightened states were punished with a small fine or brief detention" (228). Caxton also discovers that convict labour has little or no effective State supervision and that debtor laws hold blacks and poor whites in bondage under claims of debt on hundreds of farms.

Another social issue is the wretched working conditions for women and young children who work in the cotton mills as well as the absence of labor laws to protect the workers in the mills. This protest indicates Chesnutt's concern for poor whites and for poor blacks.

For example, when French visits the Excelsior Cotton Mills at Carthage, he sees "pale, anemic young women . . . and wizened children, who had never known the joys of childhood, [working] side by side at long

rows of spools" (114). Furthermore, the liveryman in Carthage adds, "Talk about nigger slavery--the niggers never were worked like white women and children in them mills. They work 'em from twelve to sixteen hours a day for from fifteen to fifty cents" (115).

French also learns that Fetters holds a majority of stock in the Excelsior Mill. He notes that Fetters' influence is everywhere: his control of the bank and cotton mill, his tenant-farmer arrangements, and his convict labor contracts in several counties. Chesnutt states, "He seemed to brood over the country round about like a great vampire bat, sucking the lifeblood of the people" (117). He also describes Fetters as "the parasite which, by sending out its roots toward rich and poor alike, struck at both extremes of society, and was choking the life of the town like a rank and deadly vine" (118).

French notes the lack of employment opportunities for citizens of Clarendon. As Archie Christmas, in conversation with Colonel French, explains, "De w'ite folks says de young niggers is triflin' 'cause dey don't larn how to do nothin'. But what is dere fer 'em to do? . . . Now all de fu'nicher, de shoes, de wagons . . . de tinware . . . even de clothes dat folks wears . . . is made in de Norf, an' dere ain' nothin' lef' fer de ole niggers ter do, let 'lone de young ones" (97-98).

Chesnutt's main question posed in The Colonel's Dream is this: Can a reform-minded white Southerner, unhindered by racial bonds such as those restricting Dr. Miller and Attorney Watson, effect economic change, social reforms, and racial reconciliation in Clarendon? Can there really be a New South? French, in view of what he has learned concerning the social issues, political concerns, and economic needs in Clarendon, now resolves, as an idealist and visionary, to commit his time, energy, and finances to make changes in this community.

His first course of action is to purchase the abandoned Eureka cotton mill in Clarendon to provide employment through the construction of a new mill on the Eureka site. His goal is to "shake up this lethargic community; to put its people to work, and to teach them habits of industry, efficiency, and thrift" (106). He plans to offer decent hours and reasonable wages (\$1.50 per day) to both black and white employees, as well as to provide model cottages for the employees.

French's plan of action, according to Andrews, correlates to reform projects initiated by various groups of New South reformers from the 1880s to 1900. Andrews writes, "Investing in the South's mushrooming textile industry, promoters particularly solicited for their region's recovery" (The Literary Career 252).

French's plan to hire black laborers, however, meets with resistance from Major McLean. He says, "You'll have trouble if you hire niggers . . . You'll find that they won't work when you want 'em to. They are not reliable, they have no sense of responsibility" (153).

French's wage scale is criticized by the white community, as the usual wage is from 50 to 75 cents per day. However, since most of the money soon finds its way into the pockets of white businessmen, that criticism soon ends.

Labor problems soon arise due to racial prejudices. Jim Green, a white foreman, refuses to follow French's orders and quits. French then promotes George Brown, a black, to serve as foreman. This unprecedented action led two white bricklayers to strike. They state to French, "We don't mind working with niggers, but we won't work under a nigger" (191).

The second plan of reform by French centers on the educational institutions of Clarendon. Young ladies attend a private school; young men attend the academy which was supported by private subscriptions and public education funds. A "coloured public school taught by a Negro teacher" (155) was also in the town. French wishes to upgrade the schools because he desires that his mill hands become "an intelligent, self-respecting

and therefore respected element of an enlightened population" (156).

This plan of action also correlates with plans of the New South reformer. Andrews writes, "The rebuilding of schools, which French also plans, was, for educational reformers like Walter Hines Page himself, a prerequisite to southern reform and advancement" (The Literary Career 252).

French challenges black leaders in Clarendon to provide educational opportunities that will help the youth to become skilled in the trades. He will also provide funds to reach this goal.

French's offer of financial grants to black leaders, according to Andrews, "sounds like such famous white industrialists as Andrew Carnegie, who endorsed [Booker T.] Washington's self-help philosophy with large grants and other philanthropic gestures" (The Literary Career 252).

In The Colonel's Dream Chesnutt also casts doubt upon the "diversified industrial economy" of the New South. He describes Clarendon as a community where there was "no great zeal for work among the white people" (70) and where "nearly all tasks were done by Negroes who had forgotten how to work, or by white people who had never learned . . ." (105). The owner of the Clarendon brickyard is an example of a white person who lacks zeal. He states, "If you r'al'y think you

want yo'r brick made here, I'll try to get them out for you. They'll cost you, though, as much, if not more than, you'd have to pay for machine-made bricks from the No'th . . . if you must have them . . ., I suppose I'll have to make 'em" (152-153).

Chesnutt's effort to expose the convict lease system in this novel is similar to the efforts of George Washington Cable to expose this system in his The Silent Southland and the Negro Question. Therefore, the inequities of the convict lease system and the inhuman treatment of convicts who work on Feters' plantation are the next objects of French's efforts to bring reform to the town.

Racial tension rises to a higher level in Clarendon when French is determined that Peter be buried in Oak Cemetery in the French family plot. Chesnutt explains, however, that "the colour line in Clarendon, as in all Southern towns, was, on the surface at least, rigidly drawn, and extended from the cradle to the grave. No Negro's body had ever profaned the sacred soil of Oak Cemetery" (262).

This hostility results in the exhuming of Peter's casket by the "Comitty," and the casket is placed on the porch of Colonel French. An attached note stated:

Kurnell French: Take notis. Berry yore ole nigger somewhar else. He can't stay in Oak Semitury. The majority of the white people

of this town, who didnt tend yore nigger
funarl, woant have him there. Niggers by
there selves, white peepul by there selves,
and them that lives in our town must abide by
our rules. By order of

Comitty.

To French's disappointment no one came to his home to object to the "Comitty's" action. Chesnutt advances this reason: "The mob spirit, which had broken out in the lynching of Johnson, still dominated the town, and no one dared to speak against it" (282). French's hope for reconciliation is not to become a reality at this time.

French's frustration in his attempts to build the mill, the lynching of Johnson, and the racial prejudice shown by Clarendon's whites towards Peter's burial in Oak Cemetery leads him to abandon his efforts as a crusader to bring about economic progress and social reform in Clarendon. Chesnutt writes, "And so the colonel faltered, and, having put his hand to the plow, turned back" (293). His initiative to bring reforms is crushed. His role as social analyst and economic reformer is over. As Chesnutt describes the consequences of white supremacy in Clarendon, he is stating his conviction that the accommodation of the races is impossible at this time.

Therefore, French's dream of a "regenerated South, filled with thriving industries, and thronged with a prosperous and happy people, . . . when law and order should prevail unquestioned, and where every man could enter, through the golden door of hope, the field of opportunity, which all might have an equal chance to win or lose . . ." (280) was not to be fulfilled now.

Chesnutt's point ultimately in The Colonel's Dream is to show that racial prejudice based upon a belief in white supremacy continues to permeate the actions and attitudes of Southern whites in the post-Reconstruction era. Thus his despair increases. He writes with a sense of finality:

But Clarendon has had its chance, nor seems yet to have had another. . . White men go their way, and black men theirs, and their ways grow wider apart, and no one knows the outcome. But there are those who hope . . . that this condition will pass, that some day our whole land will be truly free . . . and Justice, the seed, and Peace, the flower, of liberty will prevail throughout all our borders (294).

Chesnutt realizes that for economic progress to occur, all groups in the community must cooperate together. This does not happen in Clarendon.

French's failure to achieve reform leads Andrews to observe that Chesnutt attacks the reactionism of Southern tradition and portrays the inadequacy of social engineering (The Literary Career 253). Andrews' observation is valid as this novel is Chesnutt's bitter response to his contemporaries who were optimistically portraying advances made in the South in the post-Reconstruction era. The New South was described by some as having a diversified industrial economy and a spirit of reconciliation between races. However, Chesnutt describes a decaying economy and a higher level of tension between the races.

Therefore this novel of purpose shatters the myth of racial progress and harmony in the South. The evidence is clear: the segregated schools, trains, and libraries present in the South, the movement toward disfranchisement legislation, the convict labor practices, the inability of a white Southerner to effect social change and economic reforms, the lack of moral courage of white leaders in Clarendon to speak out against racial and legal injustice when they know what should be done, and the continuation of various forms of slavery by Fetters. Chesnutt senses that the rights of blacks are not advancing in the early 1900s. He sees that Southern leaders still control the freedmen. Chesnutt, therefore, is pessimistic concerning reconciliation at this time. There is an absence of

meaningful change. The "New South" is still only a dream.

As a novelist writing in 1905, Chesnutt looks to the distant future and sees economic reform, racial progress, and penal reform as a future reality in the South. He writes, "The seed which the colonel sowed seemed to fall by the wayside; it is true; . . . and while Feters and his kind still dominate their section, other hands have taken up the fight which the colonel dropped . . . Here and there a brave judge has condemned the infamy of the chain-gang and convict lease systems . . ." (293).

Chesnutt's disillusionment and despair in The Colonel's Dream then is tempered only by his belief in historical evolution. He believes that there is a steady, gradual spiritual and moral improvement in man. This belief was expressed earlier in "A Web of Circumstance. "

In summary political and social gains made by blacks during the Reconstruction era diminished due to anti-black legislation such as the loss of franchise. Increased levels of tension between races resulted in increased violence directed against the Negro populace: lynchings, riots, and arson attacks.

As Chesnutt observed these developments, he believed that through his literary efforts he could appeal to the conscience of the North and the South and

thus effect changes in attitudes and practices toward the Negro populace.

However, The Marrow of Tradition and The Colonel's Dream reflect his growing pessimism regarding any immediate improvement. He realizes that current social customs and racial practices are so deeply-rooted in Southern society that any efforts exerted by political and social reform groups are challenged by white supremacy forces.

CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSIONS

Chesnutt stated in his Journal in 1880 that he would write for a "high and holy purpose" for the "elevation of the whites" in the United States. He wished to expose the unjust spirit of caste whose power subjected an entire race to scorn and social ostracism.

Chesnutt's purpose is seen in the short stories from The Conjure Woman. He seeks to portray the "darker side of slavery" to the white community. For example, his stories portray the insensitivity and harshness of characters such as Marse Marrabo McSwayne, Mars Dugal, and Mars Jeems McLean towards the needs and feelings of characters such as Becky, Sandy, Cloe, and Jeff. Their masters' actions advance Chesnutt's theme of man's inhumanity to man. His theme of the humanity of blacks is seen in the anguish of Sandy when his wife is sold; Becky's grief when her husband is sold and when she is separated from her only child; and the heartache of Cloe when Jeff is sold to a speculator.

His purpose is additionally seen in the The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line which depict racial prejudice within the black community. Chesnutt, for example, exposes the racial prejudice of persons of mixed-race such as Mr. Ryder and of Mr. and Mrs. Cicero Clayton toward other Negroes. This attempt to create a mixed-race aristocracy shows that the

Claytons and Mr. Ryder still affirm the superiority of the white man's value system. They emphasized the whiteness of one's skin because they lived in a white society that did so. Their actions also portray Chesnutt's theme of the humanity of blacks. The inhumanity of man to his fellow man is demonstrated by Chesnutt as he portrays the mob's desire to lynch Tom Campbell and in the harsh sentence given to Ben Davis.

In Chesnutt's three novels of purpose, he speaks out uncompromisingly on the issues facing the black community. He uses social history and current issues of his era in his fiction: the traditions of Southern whites, their belief in white supremacy, the conflict concerning the Negro franchise, the evils of the convict lease system, the issue of "passing" into white society, and the prejudice of whites toward intermarriage with blacks. Chesnutt's satire is evident in his portrayal of news management by Carteret and Belmont when they realize that Tom Delamere is a murderer. His bitterness concerning racism is evident in his development of characters such as Feters, McBane, and Dr. Mackenzie. Chesnutt's compassion is portrayed toward characters such as Janet, Sandy, and Rena.

Chesnutt's fiction reveals his attempts as a social crusader to awaken the American public's conscience. His fiction reveals his belief that the problem of

racism must be addressed and not evaded. His fiction examines traditions and customs that are barriers to moral, social, and economic progress. Consequently, he portrays Rena and Tryon as victims of a Southern stance that prohibits and condemns racial intermarriage. Dr. Miller's efforts to serve the Negro community with a well-equipped hospital are shattered. Chesnutt states that the cause is white racism, the "marrow" of tradition. Thus Chesnutt's vision for changes in social practices and political systems will become a reality only when a moral revolution begins in the minds and hearts of Americans in the North and in the South. The Fusion Party has the potential for political reform; however, due to the strength of the opposition in the 1890's, Chesnutt's solution for this era is a position of accommodation--not activism.

In his early fiction Chesnutt presents his belief that there is hope for the lessening of racial bias. His characters do make the proper moral choices. For example, Ryder does reveal his identity to his wife; Winthrop does love Clara even though she is a person of mixed-race. Mary Myrover, a Southerner, transcends her mother's bias and does devote her energies to teaching black children. Ultimately Tryon desires to marry Rena in spite of the state's law against racial intermarriage. Olivia does accept Janet as her sister.

Chesnutt's later fiction portrays his growing pessimism that the South's opposing factions will not be reconciled in the near future. His increasing despair is evident in his portrayal of the Wellington riot, the failure of Miller's plea for tolerance and accommodation, the influence of secret societies such as the Ku Klux Klan, and the success of the whites to disfranchise the Negro.

Furthermore, French's dream to effect social and economic change in Clarendon is frustrated by the chains of cultural traditions and community customs. Judge Straight's acknowledgment that right and wrong are eternal truths, but that man's standards for measuring and applying them vary according to their sense of freedom in a given historical era is true in Clarendon as well. French's failure as a white Southern crusader to gain the support of white leaders in his hometown is especially devastating due to their admission that these changes are valid.

Thus French's vision (Chesnutt's dream) for a "regenerated South . . . where every man could enter, through the golden door of hope, the field of opportunity" (The Colonel's Dream 280) is crushed by the realities of racism and tradition. Chesnutt's dream for racial reconciliation, social equality, and economic progress for the South remains to become a reality in future years.

Because The Colonel's Dream was his last published novel, I believe that just as French fails in his goal to bring renewal and justice to Clarendon and withdraws from the South, so also Chesnutt's failure to break down the "unjust spirit of caste" as a social crusader through his fiction leads him to withdraw from the struggle for racial equality in 1905.

Contemporary critics, however, recognized Chesnutt as a spokesman on racial issues. They saw him as the first artistic black voice in American prose literature.

Critics gave good reviews for his The Conjure Woman, and the volume was a commercial success as well. For example, William Dean Howells notes that Chesnutt "sees his people very clearly, very justly, and he shows them as he sees them" ("Chesnutt's Stories" 700). Furthermore, The New York Mail and Express of December 9, 1899, praised The Wife of His Youth And Other Stories of the Color Line because "it simply aims to interest us in him [a black] as an individual human being, without regard to the straightness or kinkiness of his hair . . . (Heermance 135). As a result of his popularity, both Doubleday and Houghton-Mifflin desired to publish The House Behind the Cedars.

However, when The Marrow of Tradition was published, the public attacked Chesnutt because he

challenged white power groups who asserted that the South was now a land of social tranquility. Critics said it focused too much on social and political issues and that the book didn't entertain the reader. Howells praised Chesnutt for his efforts. He writes, ". . . he stands up for his own people with a courage that has more justice than mercy in it" ("A Psychological Counter-Current . . ." 881). Charles W. Anderson, an Afro-American, wrote to Chesnutt on December 11, 1901, ". . . you have not only made a noble plea for the Race before the great tribunal of public opinion, but you have told the story better than it has been told, of the peculiar relations which subsist between the intelligent Colored people of the South and their white neighbors of all classes" (Heermance 134). However, the Kansas City Star of December 8, 1901, criticized Chesnutt's stereotypes. A reviewer states, "Like most books written with a set purpose, the characters in The Marrow of Tradition are types, and this artificial method robs them of any semblance of life" (The Literary Career 203-04).

When Chesnutt published The Colonel's Dream, the London Daily Mail praised the book for its seriousness of purpose. The Washington Star gave it a favorable review. But the Nashville American for October 9, 1905, found this novel to be a "bitter, passionate arraignment of the white people of the south in their

treatment of the Negro [which] does not contribute in any way to a solution of the 'problem'" (Render 147). Supportive of Chesnutt's efforts, the Charleston News for October 29, 1905, states that "this book deals with the old theme of race in the south, but it is handled by a writer with more tolerance than usual. There is little bitterness here. It is an honest attempt to understand the southern point of view" (Render 147). But Americans, generally speaking, were not ready to face realistic racial material.

I conclude that although Chesnutt received generally favorable comment from editors and literary critics, Northerners and Southerners alike resisted his attempts, as a social realist, to enlighten their minds and to awaken their consciences concerning racial conditions in the South. As Heermance states, "... the American public had made its racial prejudices known, and felt" (153).

I believe that Chesnutt's withdrawal as a novelist from the struggle for racial equality is due to several factors. First, his moral choice to live as a voluntary black had a long-range effect on his work as a novelist. Addressing racial issues from the perspective as a Northern white would have granted him a wider audience, as his intent for writing fiction was to increase racial awareness and acceptance among whites. His decision to identify with the Negro

population limited his effectiveness as a spokesman for racial equality to Northern and Southern whites. Second, he had to picture the world of the nineteenth-century Negro as it really was in terms palatable to an almost exclusively white American book-buying public. But even events in "The Sheriff's Children" and "The Web of Circumstance," for example, were offensive to the American public and produced negative racial comments. Third, his fiction was written at a time when the North and South had reconciled to a great extent their differences concerning the treatment of the Negro in order to establish a prosperous commercial relationship. Thus the mood of the North was not receptive to Chesnutt's theme, the destructive consequences of racial prejudice. Nor was the South receptive toward his plea for social change.

As Chesnutt reflected back on his writing career in 1928, he summarizes, "My books were written, from one point of view, a generation too soon. There was no such demand then as there is now for books by and about colored people. And I was writing against the trend of public opinion on the race question at that particular time" (The Marrow of Tradition xvi).

Chesnutt's fiction also indicates, however, that he has a sense of hope for the future due to his belief in social evolution. Man still lives with a free will in a

moral universe. Dr. Miller expresses this sense of hope in his view that persons of mixed-race and Negroes will sometime gain respect for their rights, even though that era of equality is in the future. Colonel French also believes that current conditions will change to an era of equality and justice for all races. This is his future hope for the Republic.

Chesnutt's fiction reveals his perspective that mob rule, white supremacy power structures, or the Ku Klux Klan are not ultimately the solutions for progress in the South. His perspective is that the struggle for equal rights and equal opportunities for the black will be fought in the arena of conscience. It is primarily a white man's struggle. Chesnutt's hope is in a moral quickening of conscience in the hearts and minds of the white community. That quickening of conscience is seen, for example, in the hearts of Sheriff Campbell, Editor Carteret, Olivia Carteret, and George Tryon. Therefore, Chesnutt pleads for tolerance and for a progressive spirit--a spirit seen in the heart of Colonel French. Individuals such as McBane and Feters who exhibit hatred toward blacks must be challenged by those who realize in their own hearts that changes must be made in the social and political systems of the South. Man's inhumanity to man must be replaced with tolerance and understanding by all racial groups.

Chesnutt's efforts as a social crusader did not go unrecognized. On June 8, 1928, he received the Springarn Medal for his pioneer work as a literary artist depicting the life and struggles of Americans of black descent.

In conclusion Chesnutt's fiction presents his perspective concerning the black during the pre-Civil War era as well as his perspective as a black author on social, political, and racial issues present in the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction eras. I trust that this analysis will contribute toward a better understanding of Chesnutt's fiction as well as to enlarge the reader's perspective concerning race relations in the South at the beginning of the twentieth century.

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